

JOE WAYRING AT HOME



BY HARRY CASTLEMON







THE BATTLE WITH THE SQUATTERS.

FOREST AND STREAM SERIES.

JOE WAYRING AT HOME;

OR THE

ADVENTURES OF A FLY-ROD.

By HARRY CASTLEMON,

AUTHOR OF "GUNBOAT SERIES," "ROCKY MOUNTAIN SERIES,"
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JOE WAYRING AT HOME

OR

THE STORY OF A FLY-ROD.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH I INTRODUCE MYSELF.

I AM called "Old Durability"; but for fear my name may prove misleading, and cause those of my readers who are not acquainted with me to fall into the error of supposing that I am a very aged article, I desire to say, at the outset, that I am only four years old, and that I have been in active service just sixteen months. During that time I have seen a world of excitement and adventure, and have performed some exploits of which any fly-rod might be justly proud. I have hooked, at one cast, and successfully landed, two black bass, weighing together eight and a quarter pounds; I have so often been dumped in the cold waters of mountain

lakes and streams that it is a wonder my ferrules were not rusted out long ago ; I have been dragged about among snags and lily-pads, by enraged trout, pickerel and bass ; I have been stolen from my lawful owner, been kept a prisoner by boys and tramps who either could not or would not take care of me, and one of my joints has been broken. Of course, I was skillfully patched up, but, like the man whose arm has been fractured, I am not quite as good as I used to be, and am reluctant to exert all my strength for fear that I shall break again in the same place. I can't throw a fly as far as I could when I took my finest string of trout in front of the "sportsmen's home" at Indian Lake, and when I am called upon to make the attempt, my ferrules groan and creak as if they were about to give away and let me fall to pieces. For this my master laid me up in ordinary (that is what sailors say of a war vessel when she goes out of commission, and is laid up in port to remain idle there until her services are needed again), saying, as he did so, that my days of usefulness were over, but that he would keep me for the good I had done.

After having led an active life among the hills, lakes and forest streams almost ever since I could remember, you may be sure that I did not relish treatment of this sort. After doing my level best for my master, and landing more than one fish for him that he ought to have lost because he handled me so awkwardly —after going with him through some of the most exciting scenes of his life, and submitting to treatment that would have used up almost any other rod, must I be laid upon the shelf in a dark closet and left to my gloomy reflections, while a new favorite accompanied my master to the woods, caught the trout for his dinner, slept under his blanket, and listened to the thrilling and amusing stories that were told around the camp-fire? I resolved to prevent it, if I could ; so when my master took me out of my case one day to assist him in catching a muskalonge he had seen in the lake back of his father's house, I nerved myself to do valiant battle, hoping to show him that there was plenty of good hard work left in me, if he only knew how to bring it out.

The muskalonge, which was lurking in the

edge of the lily-pads ready to pounce upon the first unwary fish that approached his lair, took the frog that was on the hook at the very first cast, and then began the hardest struggle of my life. My rheumatic joints complained loudly as the heavy fish darted up and down the lake, and then dove to the bottom in his mad efforts to escape, but I held on the best I knew how until he leaped full length out of the water, and tried to shake the hook from his mouth ; then I was ready to give up the contest. He was the largest fish I ever saw.

“Scotland’s a burning !” exclaimed Joe. “Isn’t he a beauty ? If this old rod was as good as he used to be, wouldn’t I have a prize in a few minutes from now ? ”

I ought to have told you before that my master’s name is Joe Wayring ; and a right good boy he is, too, as you will find before my story is ended. Nearly all the young fellows of my acquaintance, and I know some of the best there are in the country, have some favorite word or expression which always rises to their lips whenever they are surprised, excited or angry, and the words I have just quoted are

the ones Joe always used under such circumstances. No matter how exasperated he was you never could get any thing stronger out of him.

I will not dwell upon the particulars of that fight (my joints ache yet whenever I think of it), for I set out to talk about other matters. It will be enough to say that I held fast to the fish until he became exhausted and was drawn through the lily-pads to the bank ; then the gaff-hook came to my assistance, and he was safely landed. He was a monster. I afterward learned that he weighed a trifle over nineteen pounds. Wasn't that something of an exploit for an eight ounce rod who had been threatened with the retired list on account of supposed disability? I was so nearly doubled up by the long-continued strain that had been brought to bear upon me, that when my master threw me down on the ground while he gave his prize his quietus with the heavy handle of the gaff-hook, I could not immediately straighten out again, as every well-conditioned rod is expected to do under similar circumstances.

“Why, what in the world have you got

there?" cried Joe's mother, as the boy entered the kitchen, carrying me in one hand and dragging the fish after him with the other. She seemed to be a little afraid of the young fisherman's prize, and that was hardly to be wondered at, for his mouth was open, and it was full of long, sharp teeth.

"It's the biggest muskalonge that was ever caught in this lake," replied Joe, as he laid me down upon a chair and took both hands to deposit his fish upon the table. "Didn't he fight, though? I say, Uncle Joe," he added, addressing himself to a dignified gentleman in spectacles, who just then came into the room with the morning's paper in his hand, "I shall not need that new split bamboo you promised me for my birthday, though I thank you for your kind offer, all the same. This old rod is good for at least one more summer on Indian Lake. There is plenty of back-bone left in him yet."

Uncle Joe was a rich old bachelor and very fond of his namesake, Joe Wayring, on whom he lavished all the affection he would have given to his own children, if he had had any.

He was an enthusiastic angler, a skillful and untiring bear and deer hunter, and he generally timed his trips to the woods and mountains so that Joe and some of his particular friends could go with him.

"He is the most durable rod I ever saw," added my master.

"Well, then, call him 'Old Durability'," suggested Uncle Joe.

The boy said he thought that name would just suit me, and from that day to this I have been known by every one who is acquainted with me as "Old Durability".

Having introduced myself, because there was no one to perform the ceremony for me, and told you how I came by my cognomen, I will now go back and relate how I made the acquaintance of my master, Joe Wayring.

If you will review your own life, boy reader, you may be able to find in it some incident, which happened, perhaps, long before you were out of pinafores, and which you remember perfectly, while all your life previous to the occurrence of that particular incident is a blank to you. Just so it was in my own experience.

When I first came to my senses, I found myself snugly tied up in my case and standing in a corner, looking through a glass door into a large store in which guns of all makes and fishing tackle of all kinds were kept for sale. At first I was greatly bewildered. I felt, if I may judge from what I have seen during my trips to the woods, like a boy who has just awakened from a sound sleep ; but after a while my wits came to me, and then I found that I was not alone in the show-case. There were a dozen or two fly and bait rods standing in the corner beside me, and a little further down, looking toward the back end of the store, were single and double-barreled shot-guns, muzzle and breech-loading rifles, game-bags, creels, hunting knives, dog-whips, and almost every thing else that a sportsman is supposed to need. In the show-case, which rested on the long counter in front of me, were revolvers, pen-knives, lines, leaders, flies and ordinary fish-hooks without number ; and on the opposite side of the store was an array of barrels containing glass balls, traps for throwing those balls, bicycles, tricycles, rowing and lifting machines—in fact, I saw so many

things that I did not then know the name or use of, that I became confused while I looked at them.

“Hallo, there ! Have you waked up at last ?” cried a voice, breaking in upon my meditations.

A short investigation showed that the voice came from the case that stood next on my right. I did not know, of course, what sort of a rod he was, or whether or not he would prove to be an agreeable acquaintance ; but wishing to be civil, I replied that I *had* waked up, and that, if he could tell me, I should be glad to know where I was and how I came there.

“Why, you are in a one-horse country town, a thousand miles from nowhere, and you have always been here,” was the answer, given as I thought in a tone of contempt. “I have traveled. I came all the way from New York.”

“Who are you ?” I ventured to ask ; for my new acquaintance spoke in so dignified and lofty a tone, that I stood somewhat in awe of him.

“I am a split bamboo,” said he ; and then I saw very clearly that he was disposed to throw on airs, and to lord it over those who were not

as fortunate as himself. "I am a gentleman's rod, and it takes the ducats to buy me. I am worth forty-five dollars ; while I see by the card tied to your case, that you are valued at only six and a half."

Not being quick at figures at this early period of my life, I could not tell just how much difference there was between forty-five dollars and six and a half, but I knew by the way the bamboo spoke, that the gulf that separated him from me was a wide one. I have learned some things since then. I know now that the qualities of a fly-rod do not depend upon the varnish that is put on the outside of him, any more than a boy's qualities of mind and heart depend upon the clothes he wears. The stuff he is made of and the company he keeps have much to do with the record he makes in the world. While I was turning the matter over in my mind, somebody who had been listening to our conversation, suddenly broke in with :

"You are neither one of you worth the money you cost."

I looked around to see who the new speaker was, and presently discovered him in the person

of a handsome bird gun, who rested upon a pair of deer's antlers a short distance away.

"You can't bring a squirrel out of the top of the tallest hickory in the woods, or stop a woodcock or a grouse on the wing, but I can," continued the double-barrel.

"I can catch a trout, if I have some one to back me who understands his business, and that's more than you can do," retorted the bamboo, spitefully. "I can throw a line sixty or seventy feet ; I heard the proprietor of this store say so."

"And I can throw shot sixty or seventy yards, which is three times as far as you can throw a line," shouted the double-barrel.

"You seem to think yourself of some consequence because you came from New York. I came all the way from England, and that is on the other side of the ocean."

"So you are an assisted immigrant, are you?" cried the bamboo, in tones indicative of the greatest contempt. "Well, that's all I care to know about you."

The disputants grew more and more in earnest the longer they talked, and pretty soon

there were some hard words used. I took no part in the controversy, for I felt rather bashful in the presence of those who had seen so much more of the world than I had, and who were worth so much more money, and besides I could not see what there was to quarrel about. My sympathies were with the bamboo, arrogant as he had showed himself to be, because he was an American like myself ; but still the English fowling-piece, "assisted immigrant" though he was, had a right to live in this country so long as he behaved himself, and as he was a showy fellow, I had no doubt that he would get out of the store before either the bamboo or myself. And so he did. While the dispute was at its height the door opened and a young man came in—a tall young man, with very thin legs, peaked shoes, gold eye-glasses and a downy upper lip. He walked with a mincing step and drawled out his words when he talked.

"A dude!" whispered the bamboo.

Before I could ask what a "dude" was, the proprietor came up, and the talking was for a moment hushed. Being impatient to be released from the show-case so that we could

see what was going on in the great world outside, each one of us cherished the secret hope that we might find favor in the eyes of the prospective purchaser. We were so inexperienced and foolish that we didn't care much who bought us, so long as we got out.

"I—aw! I want to look at a nice light bird gun," said the young man; "something you can recommend for woodcock and the like, don't yer know?"

"Why, that's a countryman of mine," exclaimed the double-barrel, who seemed to be highly excited by the discovery.

The bamboo hastened to assure me that he wasn't—that he was an American trying to ape English ways.

"Do you want a hammerless?" asked the proprietor.

"I—aw! They come pretty 'igh, don't they?"

"Not necessarily. Here's one worth a hundred and twenty-five dollars," replied the store-keeper; and as he spoke, he opened the showcase and took from it a double-barrel who was so very plain in appearance, that I had not before taken more than a passing glance at him. "I

judge from your speech that you are an Englishman, and if you are, you of course know more about this make of guns than I can tell you. It is a Greener."

The young man seemed pleased to know that he had succeeded in making the proprietor believe that he was not an American, but he did not seem to appreciate the gun, nor did he handle it as if he were accustomed to the use of fire-arms. He hardly knew how to bring it to his face properly.

"I—aw! Hit's very fine, no doubt," said he, after he had made an awkward pretense of examining the gun, "but I—aw! I want something a little more showy and not quite so 'igh-priced, don't yer know? Something that I can take pride in exhibiting to my 'unting friends, don't yer know?"

"We have guns that are more showy than this, but they are cheap affairs, and we don't recommend them. How would this one suit you?" said the proprietor; and as he spoke, he opened another door in the show-case, and took my bragging friend down from his place on the antlers.

It may have been all imagination on my part, but I would have been willing to affirm that his nickel-plated ornaments grew a shade dimmer as he was taken out of the case, and I am of the same opinion still. By his boasting he had led us all to believe that he was worth at least two or three hundred dollars; and you can imagine how surprised we were when we learned that he was valued at a very small fraction of that sum.

“Aw! That looks more like a gun,” said the customer. “That’s a piece, don’t yer know, that a fellah can show to his friends. Hit’ll shoot, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes, it will shoot, but it will not do as clean work as the one I just showed you.”

“Hi’ll take the risk. ’Ow much for ’im?”

“Twenty-five dollars; and that includes a trunk-shaped case, loading-tools, wiping-rod and fifty brass-shells.”

The young man handed over the money and went out, after requesting that his purchase might be sent up to the Lambert House at once, as he wished to start for the woods on the following day. As soon as the door was

closed behind him, the proprietor called out to the porter :

“ Oh, Rube ! Come here and take this Brummagem shooting-iron up to the hotel. Thank goodness it is the last one we have in stock, and I'll never buy another.”

“ I wonder how that boastful bird gun feels now,” whispered the bamboo. “ His pride had to take a tumble, didn't it ? There's no Brummagem about me, I can tell you.”

“ What do you mean by—by—” The word was too hard for me, and I stumbled over it.

“ By Brummagem ?” said the bamboo, who felt so good over the discomfiture of the English fowling-piece that he was disposed to be friendly as well as civil. “ Why, it's something that is fine and showy, but which is not in reality worth any thing. A Yankee would say that that double-barrel was a ‘ shoddy ’ article.”

“ I feel guilty every time I sell one of those guns,” continued the proprietor. “ They are made in Birmingham, England, at the cost of nine dollars apiece by the dozen.”

“ That dude will never hurt any thing with

it," observed the porter, who had taken a good look at the customer and heard all that passed between him and his employer.

"I hope he will not hurt himself with it," answered the latter. "What does he want to go into the woods for? He doesn't know a woodcock from an ostrich."

"He goes because it is fashionable, I suppose," said Rube; and I afterward found out that that was just the reason. I saw him in the wilderness a few weeks later, and had an opportunity to exchange a word or two with the Brummagem breech-loader. The latter looked decidedly seedy. He was covered with rust, his locks were out of order, and he had been put to such hard service that every joint in his make-up was loose. The second time I met him he could scarcely talk to me, because there was not much left of him except his stock. His ignorant owner—but we'll wait until we come to that, won't we?

The next customers who came into the store were an elderly gentleman and a young lady. I certainly thought my chance for freedom had come, for when the gentleman said that his

daughter wanted to look at a fly-rod, something light enough to be managed with one hand, and strong enough to land a perch or rock-bass, the proprietor pushed open the door in front of me and took me out.

“Aha!” exclaimed the bamboo. “Your fate is to be the companion and plaything of a little girl, who will probably set you to catching sunfish and minnows, and throw you down in the mud when she gets through with you. I know that I am destined for the trout streams, and I have an idea that I shall be taken to Canada to have a shy at the lordly salmon. Good-by ; but I am sorry for you.”

I did not thank the bamboo for his words of sympathy, because I did not believe they were sincere. I thought I could detect a hypocritical twang in them ; but before I could tell him so, I was taken out of my case, and for the first time given an opportunity to see how I looked.

“There is a rod I can recommend. Lance-wood throughout, nickel-plated ferrules and reel-seat and artistically wound with cane and silk,” said the proprietor, glibly. “I will

warrant him to do good work, and if the lady breaks him she will not be much out of pocket—only six dollars and a half.”

“Oh, I don’t want a cheap thing like that,” exclaimed the young lady, who would not take a second look at me after she heard that I was worth so little money. “I want a nice rod.”

The storekeeper laid me on the show-case, and brought my friend the split bamboo out for exhibition. He was a splendid looking fellow, and I did not wonder that the young lady went into ecstasies over him, and declared at once that he was just the rod she had long been wishing for. Neither could I resist the temptation to say to him, as he was put back into his case :

“What do you think now of your chances of going among the trout streams and of taking a shy at the lordly salmon! Good-by; but I am sorry for you.”

The bamboo was so crest-fallen that he could make no response. He was carried away by his new owner, and I did not see him again until I was almost ready to be laid upon the shelf in my master’s closet, to enjoy a long

winter's rest after a season of the hardest kind of work. The pride and arrogance were all gone out of him, and he did not look much as he did when he left the store. If he had been a man, folks would have called him a tramp.

CHAPTER II.

THE HISTORIAN OF THE WAYRING FAMILY.

THE bamboo having been disposed of I was returned to the show-case, where I spent two very lonely days. The rods around me were worth more money than I was, and feeling their importance they would scarcely speak to me, even to answer a civil question ; so all I could do was to hold my peace and listen to their conversation. But fate had decreed that I should not long remain a captive. One afternoon there came into the store a gentleman in gold spectacles, accompanied by two bright boys about fifteen years of age. They must have been well known to the proprietor, for he shook their hands with all the cordiality which shopkeepers know how to assume toward their rich patrons, and greeted them with :

“Ah, colonel, I am glad to see you. Well, Joseph, have you come after that rod ?”

“Yes, sir,” answered one of the boys, a curly-headed, blue-eyed lad, who looked so good-natured and jolly that I took a great fancy to him at once. “You remember what I told you the last time I was here, Mr. Brown—that I want something light and strong and inexpensive. I can’t afford to pay a high price for a rod that I may break at the very first cast. You know I never threw a fly in my life.”

“Yes, I know that,” said Mr. Brown, “and I know, too, that as a bait fisher you have few equals and no superiors among boys of your age.”

“I thank you for the compliment, but I am afraid I don’t deserve it,” said the blue-eyed boy, modestly.

“Oh, yes, you do. Now here’s a rod that will suit you exactly,” answered the proprietor, pushing open the show-case and laying hold of me. “He weighs only eight ounces, hangs beautifully, and will answer your purpose as well as one worth five times the money. Only six and a half, and that’s cheaper than you could steal him, if you were in that line of business.”

“What do you say, Uncle Joe?” asked the boy after he and his companion, whom he addressed as Roy Sheldon, had shaken me up and down in the air until it was a wonder to me that they did not break my back.

“Since Mr. Brown has recommended him, I say that you can’t do better than to take him,” was the reply, and that settled the matter. I had a master at last, and a good one, too, if there were any faith to be put in appearances. I took him for a restless, uneasy fellow who would not let me rust for want of use, and I found that I had not been mistaken in my opinion of him.

Joe, as I shall hereafter call him, next purchased, under his uncle’s supervision, three long water-proof lines, a Loomis automatic reel, a dozen cream-colored leaders of different lengths, a creel who afterward became my constant companion, and a fly-book filled with all the most tempting lures known to anglers, such as coachmen, white millers, red and brown hackles, and many other things whose names I did not know. With these under his arm and me on his shoulder he set out for home

accompanied by Roy Sheldon, Uncle Joe taking leave of them at the door, saying that he was going to the post-office.

"I wish every fellow in the world had an uncle like that," said Joe, as he turned about and waved his hand to the gentleman with the gold spectacles.

"So do I," answered Roy, "excepting, of course, Tom Bigden and his crowd."

"I don't except even them," said Joe. "Tom pulls a lovely oar, and I never saw a fellow who could play short stop or train a spaniel like him. I have nothing against any of them, and should be glad to be friends with them if they would let me."

"But haven't you seen to your satisfaction that they won't let you?" demanded Roy, rather sharply. "They've got something against you, and they'll continue to make you suffer for it; see if they don't."

I wondered what it was that any one could have against so fine a young fellow as my new master appeared to be, and it was not many days before I found out. Tom Bigden and his followers *did* make Joe suffer, but it

was principally through his friends, that is, through his sail-boat, his shell in which he used to train for his races, his canvas canoe that had carried him safely down the most difficult rapids in Indian River, and finally through me. In fact, I became a regular shuttle-cock of fortune, and was so roughly knocked about from pillar to post, that it is a wonder to me that I am as good a rod as I am.

After a few minutes' walk along a quiet street shaded on each side by grand old trees, Joe and his companion turned into a wide carriage-way which led them by a circuitous route through a little grove of evergreens to the house in which Joe lived—a fine brick mansion, with stone facings, a carriage-porch at the side door, and a croquet ground and lawn tennis court in front. Behind the house the grounds sloped gently down to the shore of a beautiful lake, with an island near the center, and with banks on each side that were thickly wooded, save where the trees and undergrowth had been cleared away to make room for the cozy summer residences of the visitors who came there every year. For Mount Airy, that was the

name of the village in which Joe Wayring lived, was acquiring some fame as a watering place. There were four springs in the vicinity, whose waters were supposed to possess some medicinal virtues, the scenery was grand, the drives numerous and pleasant, and the fishing (and the shooting, too, in the proper season), could not be surpassed.

At the foot of the path that led from the carriage-porch to the lake, was a boat-house which afforded shelter to some of Joe's friends whose acquaintance I was soon to make, and a short distance from its door his sail boat, the *Young Republic*, rode at her moorings. It was indeed a pleasant scene that was spread out before me; but before I had time to admire it sufficiently, Joe and his companion went up the stone steps three at a jump, rushed into the hall, fired their caps at the hat-rack, and without waiting to see whether or not they caught on the pegs at which they were aimed, ran up the wide stairs that led to the floor above. I held my breath in suspense and wondered what in the world was the matter now; but I afterward learned that I had no

cause for uneasiness, and that that is the way boys generally conduct themselves when they go into a house. It saves them the trouble of hunting up their father and mother and telling them that they have got home without being run over by the cars, or knocked down by a runaway horse, or drowned in the lake.

The room into which Joe conducted his friend was like the private sanctum of every other boy who delights in the sports of the woods and fields, with this exception : It was in perfect order, and as neat as a new pin. Joe's mother wouldn't have it any other way, and neither would Joe. Indeed it was a favorite saying of his that if folks would keep away and let his things alone (by "folks" he meant to designate old Betty, the housekeeper, who, according to Joe's way of thinking, was "awful fussy"), he could find any thing he wanted, from a postage-stamp to a spoon-oar, on the darkest of nights, and without a lamp to aid him in the search.

The room looked a good deal like a museum I afterward saw, only it was on a much smaller scale, of course, and it contained so many

rare and curious things that Joe's friends were always glad of an invitation "to step up for a few minutes." Uncle Joe's love for the rod and gun had led him to roam all over his own country, as well as to some remote corners of foreign lands, and during these rambles he never forgot the boy at home who thought so much of relics and souvenirs of all kinds, and took such good care of them. He gave Joe the Alpine stock which had assisted him in his ascent of Mount Blanc ; the Indian saddle and bridle he had used when fleeing from the agency at the time the Utes rose in rebellion and killed Meeker and all the other whites who did not succeed in making good their escape ; the head of the first bison he had ever shot, and which, having been mounted by an expert taxidermist, had been hung above the looking-glass over the mantle to serve as a resting place for the sword and pistols Uncle Joe carried during the war, the elk-horn bow, quiver of arrows, scalping knife and moccasins presented to him by a Sioux chief ; and for the prize lancewood bow won by my master at a shooting match ; for Joe was an archer, as well

as an angler and wing shot, and he had been Master Bowman of the Mount Airy Toxophilites until he became tired of the office and gave it up. These articles, and a good many others which I did not have time to look at, were so neatly and artistically arranged that it did not seem to me that a single one of them could be moved without spoiling the effect of the whole. Nothing looked out of place, not even the black, uncouth object that lay in a little recess on the opposite side of the room. Having never seen any thing just like him before, I could not make out what he was, and I waited rather impatiently for his master to go out of the room so that I could speak to him ; but Joe did not seem to be in any hurry to leave. He stood me up in a corner, and then he and Roy seated themselves at a table in the middle of the room, and proceeded to "fix up" a debate that was to be held at the High School on the afternoon of the coming Friday. The question was : "Ought corporal punishment in schools to be abolished ?" No doubt it was a matter in which both Joe and Roy had been deeply interested in their younger days, but

it did not affect me one way or the other, and consequently I paid very little attention to what they said. My time was fully taken up with the strange things I saw around me.

At last, to my great satisfaction, the boys concluded that they could "fix up" the matter while sailing about the lake in the *Young Republic*, better than they could while sitting by the table, especially if they could find some boat to race with, so they bolted out of the room with much noise and racket, and left the house, banging the hall door loudly behind them. Then I turned to speak to the object that occupied the recess on the other side of the room, and found that he was quite as willing to make my acquaintance as I was to make his.

"Hallo!" said he; and I afterward learned that that is the way in which school boys and telephones always greet each other.

"Hallo!" said I, in reply. "Who are you? if I may be so bold as to inquire."

"Oh, that's all right," answered my new acquaintance, cheerfully. "Every body who sees me for the first time wants to know all about me. I don't suppose I am much to look

at—indeed, I know I am not, because I can see my reflection in the mirror over the mantle—but I am the boss boat on the rapids, and am worth more on a ‘carry’ than all the cedar and birch-bark canoes in America. I am the historian of the Wayring family, or, rather, of the youngest branch of it,” he added, with no little pride in his tones. “I carry secrets enough to sink any ordinary craft, and if I only had the power to communicate some of them to my master, perhaps he wouldn’t open his eyes! I am a canvas canoe, at your service.”

“Oh!” said I.

“Yes,” said he. “And unless my judgment is at fault, you are a fly-rod. I heard Joe say that his uncle was going to get one for him.”

“That is just what I am,” I made answer. “Nickel-plated ferrules and reel-seat, artistically wound with cane and silk, and lance-wood throughout.”

My lofty speech did not have the effect I thought it would. The canvas canoe seemed to have rather an exalted opinion of himself, and I did not see why I should stay in the background for want of somebody to praise me,

and so I praised myself ; and that's a bad thing to do. I only succeeded in exciting the merriment of every occupant of the room, for I heard derisive laughter on all sides of me.

"Don't throw on airs, young fellow," said the canvas canoe, as soon as he could speak. "You have come to the wrong shop for that sort of work. I wouldn't boast until I had done something, if I were in your place. If there is any good in you, you will fare well in Joe's hands, and he will do your bragging for you ; but if you fail him when the pinch comes, you will most likely be chucked into the lake, or given away to the first little ragamuffin he can find who wants a rod that is good for nothing. So take a friend's advice and hold your tongue until you have seen service."

I felt somewhat abashed by this rebuke, for, of course, I was desirous of making a favorable impression upon those with whom I was to be associated all the days of my life. I thought I had made them despise me ; but the next words uttered by the canvas canoe showed me that I need have no fears on that score.

"A boat and a rod generally go together,

you know," said he ; "so I suppose that you and I will see much of each other hereafter."

"And how about me?" piped a shrill voice close beside me.

I looked down, and there was the creel. I had not thought of him before, and it was plain that the canoe hadn't either, for he exclaimed, in a tone of surprise :

"Who spoke? Oh, it was you, was it? Well, I don't know just what Joe will do with you, for he never owned a creel before. He has always carried his dinner in his pocket when he went trouting, or in a basket if he went out on the lake after bass, and brought his fish home on a string; but he will find use for you, you may depend upon that. He is a busy boy, is Joe, and he keeps every body around him busy, too."

"I understood you to say that you are the historian of the Wayring family," I ventured to remark, when the canoe ceased speaking.

"Of the youngest branch of it—yes. I have been a member of this household for a long time. Can't you see that I am a veteran? Don't you notice my wounds? I have been

snagged more times than I can remember, I have had holes punched in me by rocks, and some of my ribs have been fractured ; but I am a pretty good boat yet. At least Joe thinks so, for he is going to take me somewhere this coming summer, probably up into Michigan to run the rapids of the Menominee ; and, to tell you the honest truth, I am looking forward to that trip with fear and trembling. I have heard Uncle Joe say that those rapids were something to make a man's hair stand on end ; but if my master says ' go ', I shall take him through if I can. I have carried him through some dangerous places, and whenever I have got him into trouble, it has been owing to his own carelessness or mismanagement."

" I suppose he thinks a great deal of you ? " said I.

" Well, he ought to," replied the canoe, with a self-satisfied air. " I have stuck to him through thick and thin for a good many years. I was the very first plaything he owned, after he took it into his head that he was getting too big to ride a rocking-horse. He used to paddle me around on a duck pond, where the water

wasn't more than a foot deep, long before it was thought safe to trust him with a rod or gun. But Joe does not seem to care much for a gun. He is fairly carried away by his love of archery, and a long bow is his favorite weapon."

"Do you know who Tom Bigden is, and what Joe has done to incur his ill-will?" I inquired.

"I have some slight acquaintance with that young gentleman," answered the canoe, with a laugh. "It was through him that I was snagged and sunk in the Indian Lake country. I don't know how the fuss started, and neither does any body except Tom Bigden himself; but I suppose that fellow over there and a few others like him, are wholly to blame for it."

"What fellow? Over where?" I asked; for of course the canvas canoe could not point his finger or nod his head to tell me which way to look.

"This fellow up here," said a new voice, which came from over the bookcase.

I looked up, and there was another lance-wood bow, resting on a pair of deer's antlers. He was not quite as fancy as the prize bow of whom I have already spoken. His green plush

handle was beginning to look threadbare, and that, to my mind, indicated that he had seen service.

“You wouldn’t think that a few insignificant things like that could be the means of setting a whole village together by the ears, would you?” continued the canoe.

“Insignificant yourself,” retorted the long bow; but I was glad to notice that he did not speak as if he were angry. The various articles I saw about me all cherished the most friendly feelings for one another, but when they had nothing to do, they were like a lot of idle boys—always trying to “get a joke” upon some of their number. “You never won a prize for Joe, did you? Well, I have. Go and win a race before you brag. You can’t; you’re much too clumsy. One of those Shadow or Rob Roy canoes out there on the lake would beat you out of sight in going a mile.”

I cared nothing at all for this side sparring. I knew that I would have plenty of time in which to listen to it during the long winter months, when canoe, long bow and fly-rod would be laid up in ordinary, while skates,

snow-shoes and toboggans took our places in the affections of our master for the time being. For I saw snow-shoes and a toboggan there, and I knew what they were, because I had seen some like them in Mr. Brown's store. They came from Canada, and were almost as full of stories as the canoe was. Joe had worn the snow-shoes while hunting caribou in Newfoundland in company with his uncle, and the toboggan had carried his master with lightning speed over the ice bridge at Niagara Falls. Many an hour that would otherwise have dragged by on leaden wings did they brighten for us by relating scraps of their personal history, and at some future time I may induce them to put those same narratives into print for your benefit; but just now we are interested in Tom Bigden. We want to know why he disliked Joe Wayring, and what made him take every opportunity he could find to annoy him.

"When you talk about racing you don't want to leave me out," observed the toboggan, "for I am the lad to show speed. Give me a fair field, and I would not be much afraid to try conclusions with an express train. And it

takes as much, if not more, skill to manage me than it does to handle an awkward canvas canoe, who is always bobbing about, turning first one way and then another as if he were too contrary to hold a straight course.”

“I wasn’t intended for a racing boat, and I know I can’t compete with such flyers as you and a Rob Roy,” said the canvas canoe, modestly; and I afterward found that none of my new acquaintances were half as conceited as they pretended to be. They boasted just to hear themselves talk, and because they had no other way of passing the time when they were unemployed; but each was perfectly willing to acknowledge the superiority of the other in his own particular line of business. “I was intended for a portable craft—something that can be folded into a small compass and carried over a portage without much trouble; and in that respect I am far ahead of a stiff-necked Canuck, who, having made up his mind just how much space he ought to occupy in the world, would rather break than bend to give elbow-room to his betters. “You wanted me to tell you something about Tom Bigden, I

believe," added the canoe, addressing himself to me. "Well, it is a long story, but you will have plenty of time to listen to it; for if Joe and Roy have gone out on the lake, they will not return much before dark. You ought to know the full history of Tom's dealings with Joe, for you may become the victim of persecution as the rest of us are and have been ever since Tom came here; and if you were not posted, you would not know how to account for it. A long time ago—"

But there! I never could learn to tell a story in the words of another, so I will, for a time, drop the personal pronoun, which I don't like to use if I can help it, and give you in my own homely way the substance of the narrative to which I listened that afternoon. But please understand one thing before I begin: The historian was not a personal witness of all the incidents I am about to describe. He couldn't have been, unless he possessed the power of being in half a dozen different places at the same time. He saw and heard some things, of course, but much of his information had been obtained from the long bow, and from Joe and

his friends, who had freely discussed matters in his presence ; and by putting all these different incidents together, he was able to make up a story which, to me, was very interesting. I hope it may prove so to you.

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING ABOUT TOM BIGDEN AND HIS COUSINS.

MOUNT AIRY, the village in which Joe Wayring and Roy Sheldon lived, was situated a few miles away from a large city which, for want of a better name, we will call New London. It was so far distant from the city that it could not properly be spoken of as one of its suburbs, and yet the railroad brought the village so near to it that a good many men who did business in New London, Joe's father and Roy's among the number, had their homes there. It was a veritable "hide and seek town". Sometimes, as you were approaching it on the cars, you would see it very plainly, and then again you wouldn't. It was nestled in among high mountains, and in the woods which covered them from base to summit could be found an abundance of small game,

such as hares, squirrels and grouse, that afforded sport to the local Nimrods, and even received attention from the New London gunners. It was surrounded by a perfect network of babbling trout brooks, and there were several lakes and ponds in the vicinity in which some of the finest fish in the world awaited the lure of the skillful angler. And it required skill to take them, too. They were shy of strangers, and it wasn't every body who could go out in the morning and come back at night with a full creel.

Nor was larger game wanting to tempt the hunter who plumed himself on being a good shot with the rifle. Visitors standing upon the veranda of the principal hotel in the village had often heard wolves howling in the mountains, and on more than one occasion a deer had been seen standing on the opposite shore of Mirror Lake (it was generally called Wayring's Lake, because Joe's father owned the land on all sides of it), regarding with much curiosity the evidences of civilization that had sprung up on the other side. More than that, a bear was expected to make his appearance at

least once every season ; and when word was passed that he was in sight, what a hubbub it created among the visiting sportsmen ! How prompt they were to seize their guns and run out after him, and how sure they were to come back empty-handed ! Uncle Joe used to say that he believed the managers of the hotels would close their doors against the man who was lucky enough to shoot that bear, for unless Bruin had a companion to take his place, his death would spoil their advertisements. For years the proprietor of the Mount Airy House had been accustomed to tell the public, through the New London papers, that bear could be seen from the piazza of his hotel, and the announcement had brought him many a dollar from sportsmen who came from all parts of the country to shoot that bear. Why didn't Uncle Joe shoot him ? He owned the hotel.

We have said that Mount Airy was acquiring some fame as a watering-place ; but that must not lead you to infer that it was like other places of resort—lively enough in summer, but very dull in winter, for such was by no means the case. The village was lively at all

seasons of the year. Of course there were many more people there in summer than there were in winter, for during warm weather the hotels and all the boarding-houses were crowded with visitors, and so were the cottages on the other side of the lake ; but when these visitors went away, the citizens did not hibernate like so many woodchucks and wait for them to come back, because they were not dependent upon tourists either for their livelihood or for means of entertainment. Strangers were astonished when they found what a driving, go-ahead sort of people they were. They were proud of their village, of its churches, its hotels, its fine private residences, and its high-school was so well and favorably known that it attracted students from all parts of the country. It could boast of an efficient fire department, composed of all the leading men in town (the ministers and teachers, to a man, belonged to it), a military company which formed a part of the National Guard of the State, and a band of archers known as the Mount Airy Toxophilites. We ought, rather, to say that there were *two* bands of archers, one being composed of boys and girls,

and the other of their fathers, mothers and older brothers and sisters. They were both uniformed, but the boy members of the Toxophilites were the only ones who ever paraded.

It was worth a long journey to see these forty young archers turn out and march through the streets to the music of the band. They looked as neat in their green and white suits, with short top boots, and black hats turned up at one side and fastened with a black feather, as the military company did in their blue uniforms and white helmets: and as for their marching, it was nearly perfect. They had a manual of arms which originated with Uncle Joe, who, for more than a year, acted as their instructor and drill-master. They were governed by a constitution and by-laws, and fines were imposed upon those who did not turn out regularly to the drills and parades. They had shooting matches at which prizes were distributed, also a grand annual hunt, followed by a dinner that was equally grand; and every year some of the boys spent a week or two camping in the mountains, taking bows

and arrows with them instead of guns. A good many of the young archers were very fine shots with these novel weapons, and there were about half a dozen of them, of whom Joe and Roy made two, who stood ready at any time to meet an equal number of riflemen at the trap, the archers shooting at twelve yards rise and the riflemen at twenty.

On the morning of July 4, 18—, a large party of newly-arrived visitors were seated on the wide veranda of the Mount Airy House, enjoying the refreshing breeze that came to them from over the lake, and congratulating themselves on having left the city, with all its dust, heat and noise, behind them for one good long month at least. Some of these visitors had never been there before, and consequently they knew little or nothing about the village and its inhabitants. Among these were Tom Bigden and his two cousins, Ralph and Loren Farnsworth, who were leaning over the railing, fanning their flushed faces with their hats, and wondering how in the world they were going to put in four weeks' time in that desolate town. They were city boys, any body

could see that, and they were disappointed, and angry as well, because their parents had not decided to spend a portion of the summer at some place convenient to salt water, so that they could enjoy a dip in the surf now and then.

"I see a boat down there," observed Loren. "I wonder if we could hire it for an hour or two? I think I should like to take a sail on that lake, it looks so cool and inviting."

"Humph!" exclaimed Tom. "I'd much rather take a run up to Newport or over to Greenbush in my father's yacht."

"I wouldn't," answered Loren. "I can go down to the Sound any day, but a gem of a lake like this is something I haven't feasted my eyes upon in a long time. I am going to see if I can hire a boat; and after I get tired of sailing around in her, I'm going to lie to under the shade of some tree that hangs over the water, and be as lazy as I know how. That's what I came up here for."

"Boom!" said a field-piece, from some distant part of the village.

"What was that?" exclaimed Ralph. "A cannon?"

“Naw,” replied Tom, in a tone which implied that he had no patience with any one who could ask such a question. “What would a cannon be doing up here in the woods? Do you think these greenhorns are going to try to get up a celebration for our benefit?”

“No, I don’t; but they’ve got up one for their own. Do you hear that?” answered Ralph, as the warning roll of a drum, followed by the music of a band, rang out on the air. “The procession, or whatever it is, is coming this way, too. Now I shall expect to see something that will eclipse any thing New London ever thought of getting up.”

It wasn’t a celebration; it was only the annual review of the Mount Airy fire department, which was always held on the Fourth of July. Ralph and his cousins were fully prepared to make all sorts of fun of it, but when the head of the procession came into view around the corner of the street below, they were so surprised at the size of it that they had not a word to say. It took ‘up the whole width of the street, and that it was determined to have all the room it wanted, was made plain by the

actions of a couple of mounted policemen who rode in front to clear the way.

“That’s good marching, boys,” said Loren, who had seen so much of it in New London that he thought himself qualified to judge. “It is a very creditable display for so small a place as this.”

“Every body seems to think it’s going to be something grand,” sneered Tom, who was really amazed at the rapidity with which the spacious veranda was filled by the guests, who came pouring out of the wide doors in a steady stream.

“Why, there’s a military company in line with the firemen—two of them,” exclaimed Ralph.

“Visiting companies, no doubt,” said Tom, “and that’s what makes every one so anxious to see them.”

“There’s where you are wrong, Tom,” said Mr. Farnsworth, who, approaching them unobserved, had heard every word of their conversation. “You never saw a parade just like this, and I don’t believe you will ever see another unless your father and I carry out some

plans we have been talking about, and come up here to live.”

“To live?” echoed Tom.

“Up here in the woods?” cried Ralph.

“Among all these country greenhorns!” chimed in Loren.

“You will find very few country greenhorns in Mount Airy,” said Mr. Farnsworth, with a laugh. “Why, boys, those fire companies represent millions of New London’s business capital.”

“Oh!” said Tom.

“Ah!” said Ralph.

“That makes the thing look different,” added Loren. “I supposed that they were made up of the same material we used to find in the old volunteer organizations.”

“By no means. They are all rich and intelligent men. They own valuable property here, and by taking an interest in their fire department, they get their insurance at much lower rates than we do in the city.”

The near approach of the column put a stop to the conversation. First came the drum-major, a big six-footer, with a high bear-skin

cap, which made him look a great deal taller than he really was, and behind him the band, which discoursed as fine music as any body wanted to hear. Then came the hook and ladder company, two hundred strong, marching four abreast and drawing their heavy truck after them without the least apparent exertion. Next came a steam fire engine, drawn by men instead of horses, after that a hose cart, followed by a small company of about twenty young fellows in black dress-coats and white trowsers and caps, who pulled along something that looked like a skeleton road wagon, loaded with Babcock fire extinguishers.

"That's a little the queerest looking turn-out I ever saw," Tom remarked. "*They* couldn't do any thing toward putting out a fire. I suppose they are more for show than any thing else."

"Wrong again," said Mr. Farnsworth. "They have done good work, and the citizens, in recognition of their services, presented them with money enough to build an engine house for themselves, and furnish it in fine style."

Next came the soldiers, veterans, every one

of them, and behind them a company of oddly uniformed youngsters, whose movements were governed by the blast of a bugle instead of the word of command. They must have been the ones the guests were waiting for, for when they came in sight, and, following the movements of the military company, executed the maneuver : "Platoons right front into line," which they did with as much soldier-like precision as the veterans themselves, the gentlemen on the veranda cheered them lustily, while the ladies waved their handkerchiefs and bombarded the ranks with bouquets, which were deftly caught by the boys, and impaled upon the ends of their long bows.

"Now, then, can any body tell me who and what those fellows are ?" exclaimed Ralph.

"They are the Mount Airy Toxophilites," replied Mr. Farnsworth.

"Lovers of a bow or arrow," said Ralph, who was well up in his Greek. "What do they do ?"

"Oh, they have regular shooting-matches, drills and parades, and now and then a hunt and a camp in the woods."

“They can’t hit any thing with those bows, of course.”

“Yes, I believe they can,” replied Mr. Farnsworth. “I am told that when they go on a hunt, they are as sure of coming back full-handed as those who use guns. After passing in review before the trustees, they are to have a drill in the park. I see that a good many of the guests are getting ready to go down, and if you would like to see it, we will go also.”

Tom and his cousins had found reason to change some of their opinions during the last few minutes, and that was just what Mr. Farnsworth desired. He had talked with that very end in view—to make them see that New London was not the only place in the world in which boys could enjoy themselves, and to prepare them for the change which he and his brother-in-law, Tom’s father, intended to make that very summer. They were anxious to get their boys away from New London, for it was full of temptations which Tom and his cousins found it hard to resist. They were learning to think more of billiards than they did of their books, and they had even been known to roll

ten-pins for soda water. Soda water wasn't hurtful, and neither were ten-pins nor billiards ; but the conditions under which the one was imbibed and the others played certainly were. In Mount Airy there was none of that sort of thing. Of course there were billiard rooms and ten-pin alleys there, but they belonged to the hotels, and were kept for the exclusive use of the guests. The men who had just marched up the street owned all the land for miles around, and they would not sell a foot of it. They were willing to lease it for a term of years, but before they did so, they wanted to know all about the man who applied for the lease, and the business he intended to follow while he remained in town. In that way they made the society of the village just what they wanted it to be. It is true that some objectionable characters now and then secured a temporary foothold there, but as soon as they were detected, they were "bounced" without ceremony.

Mr. Farnsworth and Mr. Bigden thought Mount Airy would be just the place for their boys, but the latter would have raised the most decided objections if the subject of a change of

residence had been broached to them before they witnessed that parade, and learned something about the men and boys who composed it.

"I'll tell you what's a fact!" said Tom, as he and his cousins walked with Mr. Farnsworth toward the park where the drill was to be held. "Uncle Alfred was right when he said that we would not find many country bumpkins here. Those bowmen must have lots of fun. Do you and father really intend to come here to live?" he added, turning to Mr. Farnsworth.

"We have been thinking and talking about it for a long time," was the answer.

"All right. I am in favor of it," said Tom. "I wonder if we could get into that company of archers!"

"Of course we could," said Loren.

"There's no 'of course' about it," answered his father. "You would be balloted for the same as the rest; and I have been told that one black-ball would keep you out for a year."

"Humph!" exclaimed Tom. "They wouldn't black-ball *us*. I guess our folks have just as much money as any body here."

“No, they haven’t ; and even if they had, it would make no sort of difference. Money doesn’t rule the world up here as it does down in New London. I am informed that some of the boys in that company are so poor that the others had to help them buy their uniforms.”

“Humph !” said Tom. “Well, if that’s the sort of trash they take into their company, I don’t know that I care to belong to it, do you, boys? We don’t have any thing to do with such fellows in the city.”

“Couldn’t we gradually weed them out?” asked Loren. “That’s the way we did with our ball club, you know.”

“Yes, and what was the consequence?” demanded his father. “You ‘weeded out’ your very best players, and you have been beaten by every club you have met since. Served you right, too.”

“Well, I would rather be beaten than be chums with fellows who were too mean to chip in two or three dollars when we wanted to get up a dinner,” observed Loren.

“They were not too mean ; they couldn’t do it. The two or three dollars that you speak of

so lightly, were a large sum in the eyes of boys whose fathers gain a livelihood by working by the day, and you ought to have exercised a little common sense in your dealings with them. If it were necessary that you should have the dinner or starve, why did you not pay for it yourselves, and not ask those poor boys to 'chip in', as you term it? There's the high school," said Mr. Farnsworth, pointing with his cane to an imposing building, standing in the midst of extensive and well-kept grounds which occupied one whole block of the village property.

"That's my great objection to Mount Airy," said Ralph, shaking his fist at the school house. "Our teacher told us one day last term that the binomial theorem is just the same in China and Brazil that it is in New London, so I suppose it must be the same up here. Fine scenery around a school house doesn't make the lessons inside any easier."

"You're right there," growled Tom, who was thinking of those Orations of Cicero to which he would have to devote his attention next term, "I'd much rather go fishing."

The boys reached the park long before the procession did, and took up a position near the pagoda in which the president of the village and the trustees were to stand while the line passed in review. When it arrived, the band led the way around the park until it met the advancing column; then it turned inside of it and went around again, and thus the whole line, with the exception of the Toxophilites, was wound up like a coil. The archers kept straight ahead, the boys in the ranks carrying arms, and the captain saluting by bringing his bow to a position that somewhat resembled the "secure arms" of the tactics, until they reached a clear space at the other end of the park which had been reserved on purpose for them. There they halted, and, when the firemen had broken ranks, and the soldiers had been brought to parade rest, their commanding officer put them through the manual of arms and some intricate evolutions in the school of the company, giving his orders to the bugler who stood beside him, and not to the company itself. Ralph and Loren were delighted with every thing they saw, and had many words of

praise to bestow upon the young bowmen ; but Tom was silent and sullen. He didn't like to hear so much cheering when none of it was intended for him. When he was engaged in a game of ball he always flew into a passion if he made an error, or if any of the other side made a play that called forth applause from the spectators. He was angry now ; but it would have puzzled a sensible boy to tell what reason he had for it.

“ That captain, or whatever you call him—” began Loren.

“ Master bowman,” said his father.

“ Well, he is a nobby fellow, and that bugler looks gorgeous in his green uniform with its white facings,” continued Loren. “ I wonder who they are, any way ? ”

“ Why don't you go and inquire ? ” asked Mr. Farnsworth.

“ They wouldn't speak to you,” snarled Tom. “ They're little upstarts ; I can tell that from here by the frills they throw on.”

Loren and his brother didn't care if they were. The signs seemed to indicate that they were coming to Mount Airy to live, and if that

was the case, they wanted to know something about the boys they would have for their associates. So as soon as the drill was brought to an end and the ranks were broken, they set out to scrape an acquaintance with the master bowman and bugler, Tom following them with rather a listless, indifferent air. But in reality he was as eager as his cousins were. Would he not be willing to give something handsome if he could make himself the leader of a select band like that?

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOUNT AIRY TOXOPHILITES.

LOREN and Ralph Farnsworth, in spite of Tom's predictions to the contrary, had no trouble in scraping an acquaintance with the first bowman they met. It was Arthur Hastings, the secretary of the company and one of the best shots in it. They drew his attention by touching their hats to him as he passed (that is, the brothers did, Tom being in too bad humor to be civil), and Arthur seeing that they desired to speak to him, stopped and opened the conversation himself.

"I know almost every stranger here this summer, but I don't remember to have seen you two before," said he, pulling off his white gloves and extending a hand to each of them.

"We came on the early morning train," replied Ralph. "We were just in time to witness your parade, which I assure you was

something we did not expect to see up here in the woods. You bowmen are bully soldiers."

"Thank you," said Arthur, raising his hand to his hat in response to Tom's very slight nod. "There must be something in what you say, for every one who comes up here tells us the same. The truth is, we ought to be proficient. We have been under the strictest kind of a drill-master, and have done plenty of hard work since our organization two years ago."

"What first put the idea into your heads?" inquired Loren. "You got it out of your history, didn't you?"

"And if you did, why don't you dress up like Indians and adopt their system of tactics?" chimed in Tom, who for the moment forgot that he had resolved that he would not have a word to say to any of the bowmen. "I have read that the Sioux have a drill of their own which is so very bewildering that our best troops can't stand against it. It seems to me that you make hard work of something that might, under different management, be made to yield you any amount of pleasure."

"We are very well satisfied with the way

our affairs are managed," answered Arthur, who did not quite like the tone in which Tom uttered these words. "You must know that we are not copying the aborigines, but the Merry Bowmen of Robin Hood's time. Of course we have to work, for if we didn't we couldn't give exhibition drills ; but somehow we see plenty of fun with it all. The idea was suggested to us, not by our histories, but by an old man who lives up here in the woods," added Arthur, turning to Loren, at the same time jerking his thumb over his shoulder and nodding his head toward an indefinite point of the compass. If he intended by these motions to give his auditors an idea of the direction in which the old man referred to lived, he failed completely. "He has seen better days. He used to belong to an archery club in his own country—that's England, you know—and I tell you he is a boss shot. He makes a very good living with his bow now ; but he is so much ashamed of the accomplishment—"

"Excuse me," interrupted Loren. "I don't see why he should be ashamed of it."

"Neither do I," said Arthur. "But you see,

there are very few people in this country who take any interest in archery, and sportsmen, as a general thing, look upon the long bow as a toy ; but they always change their minds when they see what it can be made to do in the hands of an expert. Now take those two boys, for example," added Arthur, directing Loren's attention to the master bowman and his bugler. "It isn't every rifle shot who can break as many glass balls in the air as they can."

"Who are they?" inquired Tom. "We noticed them particularly during the drill."

"They are Wayring and Sheldon. Would you like to know them? They're good fellows."

Arthur looked at Tom as he said this, but Tom didn't act as though he heard him. He wasn't anxious to make the acquaintance of boys who could beat him at any thing, but his cousins were not so mean spirited.

"Certainly we would," replied Ralph. "It looks now as though we were coming here to live ; and if we do, we should like to know something about the boys into whose company we shall be thrown."

It would seem from this that Ralph took it for granted that he and his brother and cousin would get into the company without the least trouble, and he was somewhat surprised because Arthur did not offer to take in their names at the very next meeting ; but he did not even ask them what their names were. He led them to the place where the master bowman and his bugler were standing in the midst of a party of their friends, and, as soon as the opportunity was presented, introduced them as visitors who thought it possible that they might one day become permanent residents of the village. Then he excused himself and went off to hunt up one of the girls with green and white badges, who were carrying little buckets of lemonade around among the thirsty firemen and soldiers.

Tom and his cousins found the young archers to be very pleasant and agreeable fellows, but a trifle too independent to suit them. They did not seem to think that Tom was better than any other boy because his father was a banker, and owned a yacht in which he talked of going to Florida during the coming winter, and neither did they ask him and his cousins to step

up to the armory when they fell into ranks and marched up to put away their bows and quivers. They left them standing in the park, as they did scores of others who had been talking to them, and that was a slight that Tom said he would not soon forget.

“You are altogether too touchy,” said Loren, with some impatience in his tones. “You appear to think that every boy who lives outside the city limits must, of necessity, be a greenhorn. These fellows know as much about New London as we do.”

“When I become a member of that company, I shall use my best endeavors to bring about a different state of affairs,” said Tom, decidedly. “If they are taking pattern after Robin Hood, why don’t they pass their time as he and his men did, lounging about in the greenwood under the shade of the trees, instead of parading through the streets on a hot day like this? I don’t see any fun in that.”

Nevertheless, before he had passed a week in Mount Airy, Tom Bigden decided that it was just such a place as he had always thought he should like to live in, and his cousins came to

the same conclusion. So did their fathers and mothers ; and so it came about that a couple of Mr. Wayring's handsome cottages, on the other side of the lake, were rented until such time as Mr. Farnsworth and his brother-in-law could erect houses on the grounds they had leased in the village.

Tom and his cousins lost no time in getting ready to enjoy themselves. Before another week had passed away, they had the finest sail and row boats, and the most expensive canoes on the lake ; and in anticipation of their immediate admittance to the ranks of the Toxophilites, they sent for a supply of bows and arrows and ordered uniforms of their tailor. But the old saying, that there's many a slip, held good in their case ; and this was the way they found it out :

One afternoon they and their parents were invited to a lawn party, at which the Toxophilites, girls as well as boys, appeared in force and in uniform, the girls wearing white dresses, green sashes and badges, and light straw hats, turned up at the side and fastened by a tiny silver arrow, which, at

the same time, held in place the long black plume of the company. Tom declared that they looked stunning ; and when he saw how they sent their arrows into the target, hitting the gold almost as often as they missed it, and played croquet and skipped about the lawn tennis ground, he added that he had never been to such a party before, nor seen handsomer girls. He was going to apply for admission to the club, and he wasn't going to waste any time in doing it, either. With this object in view, he hurried off to find Arthur Hastings.

"I don't wonder that you fellows are happy here," was the way in which he began the conversation.

"Yes, I suppose we see as much pleasure as falls to the lot of most people," answered Arthur, "but we have any amount of hard work as well."

"I never see you do any," said Tom.

"That's because you are not acquainted with us or our ways. I drilled until after ten o'clock last night, and spent this forenoon in working in the garden and wrestling with my

geometry ; getting ready for next term you know."

"Do you study and work during vacation?" exclaimed Tom, who had never heard of such a piece of foolishness before.

"Of course I do ; we all do."

"I'm glad that I haven't such parents as you seem to have," said Tom, rudely.

"Our parents have nothing whatever to do with it. It's the rule of the company."

"That you shall work during vacation?" cried Tom.

"That we shall keep busy at something—yes. We are told that an idle brain is the workshop of a certain old chap who shall be nameless, but we go further, and hold that there is no such thing as an idle brain. It is at work all the time during our waking hours, and sometimes when we are asleep—dreams, you know—and if it is not busy with good things, it is ready to take in bad ones. Have you seen any boys loafing around the corners since you have been here? Then you can bet your bottom dollar that they didn't belong to us."

"Well, when I get to be a member of the

company, I shall vote down all such rules as that," said Tom to himself. "A fellow needs a little time to be lazy, and I shall take it, too, without asking any body's consent. Then aloud he asked, as if the thought had just occurred to him: "By the way, when do you hold your next meeting?"

"Thursday night."

"Well, take in our names, will you? Mine and my cousins'."

"I should be glad to oblige you, but I can't do it."

"You can't do it?" said Tom, who was angry in an instant. "Why not, I'd like to know?"

"There are two reasons. In the first place, you have not been here long enough—we don't know any thing about you."

"If that isn't a little ahead of any thing I ever heard of I wouldn't say so!" exclaimed Tom, as soon as his rage would permit him to speak. "My father is—"

"We don't care who or what your father is; we must know what *you* are. In the second place, our membership is limited, and the boys' roster is full."

“Couldn’t you suspend the rules for once?”

“That’s no rule. It is a part of the constitution.”

“Well, couldn’t you amend it?”

“No, we couldn’t. It has been tried in the case of one of the best fellows in town—or, rather, he was one of the best until he found that he couldn’t wind eighty boys and girls around his finger, and then he turned against us and stands ready to-day to do us all the harm he can.”

“And you will find, to your cost, that my cousins and I will do the same thing,” thought Tom, and it was all he could do to keep from uttering the words aloud. “Things have come to a pretty pass when a lot of Yahoos can make gentlemen knuckle to them. Who is this boy?”

“His name is Prime; but I tell you, as a friend, that you must not have any thing to do with him if you want to get into the company. There are half a dozen of our fellows going away this fall, and then, if you feel like it, you can make a try for membership. Perhaps I

shall be able to help you to the extent of one vote, though I can't promise to do so."

"How about the yacht and canoe clubs?" said Tom, with something like a sneer in his tones. "No doubt they are full, too."

"Oh, no, they're not. Any good fellow who owns a boat or who intends to get one, can come in there. Are you and your cousins good swimmers? Then why don't you join us and enter for the up-set race that will come off next month."

"I don't know what kind of a race that is."

"It'll not take long to tell you. You see the contestants come out clad in some light stuff that won't hold much water, and when they are well started in the race, a signal is given, generally the blast of a bugle, whereupon each fellow must overturn his boat, climb into her again and go ahead as if nothing had happened. The one who crosses the line first, is of course the winner."

'Who among you is the best at that kind of a race?'

"Well," replied Arthur, with some hesita-

tion, "it is nip and tuck between Wayring, Sheldon and me."

"I expected as much," said Tom, to himself. "Wayring, Sheldon and Hastings are better than the rest at every thing. I shall enter for that or some other race, and if I don't take the conceit out of all of you, I shall never forgive myself. Then it would not be of any use for me to try to get into the Toxophilites?" he said, aloud.

"Not the slightest. I'll tip you the wink when there is an opening, and you can apply or not, just as you think best. We never ask any body to join us."

"But you asked me to join the canoe and yacht clubs."

"I know it, and I had a right to. The three organizations are governed by entirely different rules. There's the bugle," said Arthur, catching up his bow which lay on the rustic bench on which he and Tom had been sitting during this conversation. "I must go and shoot as soon as I can find my girl. Come on, and see us punch the gold three times out of five."

"I can't," replied Tom. "I must hunt up

the hostess, tell her I have had a very pleasant time and all that, and bid her good-by. I have another engagement."

This was not quite in accordance with the facts of the case. Tom had no other engagement, but he wanted to go off by himself, or in company with Loren and Ralph, and give full vent to his feelings of disappointment and rage. He shook his fist at Arthur when the latter turned his back and hurried away, and it would have afforded him infinite satisfaction if he could have followed him up and knocked him down. He found his cousins after a while, and although they stood in the midst of a jolly group and were laughing gaily, and appeared to be enjoying themselves, Tom was well enough acquainted with them to tell at a glance that they were as angry as he was.

"Sorry to break in upon so pleasant a gathering as this one seems to be," said Tom, approaching the group, one of whom was the young lady in whose honor the party was given, "but our time is up."

"Why, Mr. Bigden, you don't mean to say that you are going away so soon, and before

supper, too?" exclaimed the young lady, who looked so charming in her neat uniform that Tom had half a mind to go back and pound Arthur Hastings for telling him that he couldn't become a Toxophilite at once.

"Must—can't be helped," answered Tom, giving his cousins a look which they understood. "We are indebted to you for a very pleasant afternoon, Miss Arden."

"I don't believe you have enjoyed yourselves one bit," exclaimed the fair archer. "If you have, why do you go away so early? The next time you attend one of our lawn parties, be sure and arrange your business so that your other engagements can wait."

After a little more badinage of this sort, Tom and his cousins lifted their hats and walked off. As soon as the front gate had closed behind them, the expression on their faces changed as if by magic, and the three boys turned toward one another with clenched fists and flashing eyes. After each one had glared savagely at his neighbor as if he were going to strike him, they all put their hands in their pockets and moved away. Tom was the first to speak.

"Now that I look back at it, I don't see how I kept my hands off that Hastings boy while he was talking so insolently to me," said Tom. "He told me that he didn't care who or what my father was, but I couldn't get into the archery club, and that was all there was about it. They must stick to their constitution, no matter if the world goes to pieces on account of their obstinacy. He asked me to join the canoe and yacht clubs, but said they never asked any body to apply for admission to the Toxophilites."

"I guess Ralph and I know just what he said to you first and last," remarked Loren, "for Sheldon talked to us in about the same way. We are going to enter for the upset race."

"I thought you would," answered Tom, "and so I made up my mind to go in too. We'll make it our business to see that neither Sheldon nor Wayring wins that or any other race. If we find that we can't beat them by fair means, and I have an idea that I can paddle a boat about as fast as the next boy, although I never got into one until last week,

we'll foul them, and sink their boats so deep that they will never come up again."

"Loren and I talked that matter over, and resolved upon the same thing," said Ralph. "Did Hastings tell you any thing about a George Prime who is down on them because they would not take his name before the Toxophilites? Sheldon told us to give him a wide berth, but Loren and I thought we would do as we pleased about that."

"That's just what I thought," answered Tom. "I think it would be a good plan to hunt him up the very first thing we do. If he has reason to dislike Wayring and his friends, we might induce him to strike hands with us."

"That was our idea," said Ralph. "It can't be possible that Prime is the only boy in this village who does not like Wayring and the rest, and if we find them to be the right sort, and can raise enough of them, what's the reason we can't get up a club of our own?"

"That's another idea," said Tom, who was delighted with it. "I wish I had thought to ask Hastings where Prime lives."

"I know where his father's drug-store is, for

I saw the sign over the door," said Loren. "Let's go down there and get a cigar, and trust to our wits to learn something about him."

The others agreeing to this proposition, Loren led the way to the drug-store, and the three stopped in front of the show-case near the door in which the cigars were kept.

"That's Prime, and I know it," whispered Tom, as a dashing young fellow, who was seated at the further end of the store reading a paper, came up to attend to their wants. "He looks to me like a chap who isn't in the habit of allowing himself to be imposed upon, and that's the sort we want to run with."

"See-gahs? Yes, sir," said the clerk. "Being from the city, you want the best, of course. There you are, sir. Genuine imported."

"How do you know that we are from the city?" inquired Loren, as he made a selection from the box that was placed on the show-case.

"Because I was a city boy myself, until father took it into his head that he wanted to spend a summer at Mount Airy," replied the clerk. "That was a bad move for me, for we

have been here ever since. Besides, in a little place like this, every body knows more about your business than you do yourself. I know who you are, and where you came from, and all about it."

"Then it was a bad change for you, was it?" said Ralph. "You don't like to live here? Neither do we."

"I don't blame you," said the clerk. "Wait until you get acquainted with some of these old-timers and find out what an exclusive lot they are, and you will dislike it worse than you do now. There are a few of them, especially the Toxophilites, as they call themselves, who try to monopolize all the fun there is going."

"Why don't you join them?" asked Tom.

"Because they won't let me—that's why."

"Then you must be George Prime."

"That's my name, and you are Tom Bigden, and you two are Loren and Ralph Farnsworth."

"You've hit it," answered Tom. "They wouldn't take us in either. They told us so not more than an hour ago. Why didn't you go to the party?"

"Because they didn't invite me," said Prime, angrily. "I don't get invitations to any thing any more. I showed rather too much spirit to suit them, and so they dropped me."

"Probably they will do the same by us," said Loren. "We have always been in the habit of doing as we pleased, and we don't intend to change our mode of life for the sake of getting into an archery club that makes its members drill until ten o'clock when they might see more fun in playing billiards. There will be some vacancies this fall, and then we shall make another attempt to get in."

"Is that what you have made up your minds to? Well, now, look here." As Prime said this, he came out from behind the counter and stood in the open door, looking up and down the street. "You must begin by doing your smoking in secret," he continued, as he came back and motioned to the boys to follow him toward the rear of the store.

"Do you mean to say that the Toxophilites look with disfavor upon a good cigar?" demanded Tom.

"I do, indeed. You mustn't use tobacco in

any form, and you must be temperate in all things—in eating, drinking and talking. They'll fine you if you use any language while you are out with your companions, that you wouldn't use if your mother or sister was present. Now sit down here, and if you see any body coming, you can put your cigars out of sight.”

“But we don't know all the members of the club,” said Loren.

“No difference. Don't let any one see you with a weed in your mouth. If you do, good-bye to all your chances of being a Toxophilite.”

“Why, it's the meanest little town I ever heard of!” exclaimed Ralph, who was greatly surprised as well as disgusted. “I didn't suppose that there were any such boys in this wicked world. I thought they all lived in Utopia.”

“So did I, until I found some of them right here in Mount Airy,” answered Prime. “The girls are at the bottom of it—you know that they are never easy unless they are kicking up a row of some kind—and if I had been a member of the club when it was organized, wouldn't

I have worked hard to keep them out? I was very anxious to get into it once, but I don't believe I care to be one of them now."

Tom and his cousins began to feel the same way.

CHAPTER V.

TOM INTERVIEWS THE SQUATTER.

“ I DON’T believe I care to be one of them now,” repeated Prime, who, being a pretty good judge of character, knew that he ran no risk in speaking freely in the presence of the three boys before him. “ I wish I could see their old organization knocked higher than the moon ; or else I wish that a few more new fellows of the right sort would come in, so that we could have a club of our own.”

“ I was about to suggest that very thing,” said Tom. “ It can’t be possible that Wayring and his cronies have got every boy in town under their thumbs.”

“ Not by a long shot !” exclaimed Prime. “ There are ten or a dozen besides myself who do not bow to them.”

“ And my cousins and I add three to the number,” replied Tom. “ That’s enough for a

hunting club. But we will talk about that at some future time. Do you belong to the other clubs?"

Prime replied that he did, adding that any body could get into them, for there was no limit to the membership.

"The canoe and yacht clubs are getting large enough to be unwieldy," said he. "I know of a good many boys who are not satisfied with the way things are managed, and it wouldn't surprise me at all if there should be a split some day. There are a few of us who are talking it up as fast as we can. We are getting tired of seeing the same old tickets elected every year, and think it high time we had a change."

"Is Wayring much of a canoeist?" asked Tom.

"Indeed, he is. He can walk away from any one around here, I am sorry to say, and in fact, there's hardly any thing that boy can't do. I would give almost any thing to see him beaten, and I—say!" exclaimed Prime, a bright idea striking him. "Are you fellows canoeists?"

"My cousins are; but I can't say as much for myself," answered Tom. "I have always

been called a very fair sculler, and after I learn how to balance a canoe, I know I have muscle enough to make her get through the water. Hastings led me to believe that it was a tight squeak between Wayring, Sheldon and himself."

"Aw!" said Prime, in a tone of disgust. "You let Hastings alone for shoving in a good word for himself as often as the opportunity offers. He never won the first prize in his life. Joe Wayring walks away with it every time. Suppose you fellows come in and see if you can't make Joe lower his broad pennant for a while. If you find that you can't beat him—and, although I am no friend of his, I tell you plainly that it will be the hardest piece of work you ever undertook—you might get in his way and let him foul you, you know. I tried my level best to do it last year, but he was too smart for me."

By this time it was plain to all the boys that they understood one another perfectly. The truth of the matter was, that Joe Wayring and some of his particular friends had won too many honors, and made themselves altogether

too popular in the community. These boys were angry about it, because they wanted to be first in every thing themselves. Tom Bigden and his cousins had fully intended to take Mount Airy by storm, and to establish themselves at once as leaders among their new acquaintances ; and their failure to accomplish their object bewildered as well as enraged them. If they had known how to go about it, they would have disgraced Joe Wayring before he saw the sun rise again. So would George Prime. Of course they did not say it in so many words, but that was what each boy told himself.

Before Tom and his cousins left the store they entered into an alliance with Prime, both offensive and defensive, and talked over various plans for annoying the boys who had unwittingly incurred their displeasure. If they could not injure Joe and his friends in any other way, they could put them to some trouble and expense, and this they resolved to do the very first good chance they got. They did not decide upon any particular course of action, but Prime said that if Tom and his cousins would come

to the store the next day, he would introduce them to a lot of good fellows who did not like Joe and his "clique" any too well, and who would be glad to be revenged upon them for some real or imaginary grievance.

"I see very clearly that there is a good deal of feeling against Wayring and his followers, and if we handle it rightly we can make it work to our advantage," remarked Tom, as he and his cousins walked slowly homeward. "It is a wonder to me that something hasn't been done to him before this time. What they lack is a leader—some one to propose a plan and go ahead with it."

"Well, they have found him at last—three of him," said Loren. "I always was opposed to living in a little country town, because you invariably find fellows there who think they know more than any body else—"

"And plenty of others who are willing to uphold them in that belief," chimed in Ralph. "I say, don't let's have any thing to do with the Toxophilites. Let's get up a club of our own and manage it as we see proper."

"I am in favor of that," replied Tom

“We’ll have no fines and drills, for one thing, and neither will we admit any girls who stick up their noses at a good cigar. But there is one thing we must not forget to do when we meet those fellows at the store to-morrow. If we decide upon any thing, we must be careful how we carry it out. If we are foolish enough to let Joe and the rest know that we are down on them, and that we intend to do them all the injury we can, they will make things very unpleasant for us. We don’t want them to serve us as they have served Prime, and read us entirely out of their good books—”

“And that is just what they will do if they see us in Prime’s company,” interrupted Loren. “Sheldon said so.”

“There is no need that they should ever see us in his company,” replied Tom. “Our best plan would be to hold all our meetings in secret—”

“And keep our organization, if we have any, a secret,” chimed in Ralph.

“That’s the idea,” said Tom. “Then we can do as much damage as we please in the way of setting boats adrift; and so on, and

Joe and his followers will be at loss to know where the annoyance comes from. We mustn't forget to speak to the fellows about that to-morrow."

Unfortunately an incident happened that very afternoon which made it comparatively easy for the three schemers to carry out the plans they proposed. It was, in fact, a fight between a squatter and the Mount Airy authorities, to whom he had made himself obnoxious. Tom and his cousins were witnesses of the preliminary skirmish, that is, the serving of the notice of ejectment, and when they heard a full report of the matter from one of the boys to whom Prime introduced them, their delight was almost unbounded. Tom danced a horn-pipe in the excess of his joy, and repeatedly declared that nothing could have happened that was so well calculated to further their designs. It came about in this way :

Mr. Wayring's summer cottages were all located on the opposite shore of the lake. The road that led to them ran down the hill, around the foot of the lake, and through a

little settlement which bore the euphonious name of "Stumptown." Why this name had been given to it no one seemed to know. It certainly was not appropriate, for there was not a stump to be seen in any of its well-cultivated gardens, from which the Mount Airy and Lambert Houses drew their supplies of vegetables and small fruits.

The male members of this little community were licensed guides and boatmen—the only ones, in fact, who had the right to serve the guests of the hotels in that capacity. They lived on Mr. Wayring's land, and in neat little cottages which the liberal owner had erected for their especial benefit. When the season was over and the guests returned to their homes in the city, these men hunted and trapped in the mountains, and entertained the village boys, with whom they were great favorites, and who often invaded their humble abodes during the long winter evenings, with thrilling and amusing tales of life in the wilderness. They taught the boys woodcraft, and made themselves so useful in other ways, that the young Nimrods of the village had never been able to decide

how they could manage to get on without them.

Into this settlement there came one day an unkempt man, with a red nose and a very forbidding face, who brought with him a large punt, into which he had crowded all his worldly treasures, including his wife and two stalwart sons, not one of whom was one whit more prepossessing than the husband and father. Without saying a word to any body the red-nosed man, who answered to the name of Matt Coyle, took possession of a piece of ground that had been cleared but not fenced in, and began the erection of a shanty with boards which formed a part of the punt's cargo. While he and his sons were at work Mr. Hastings, who was one of the village trustees, rode by. He did not at all like the appearance of the new-comers, but he had nothing to say to them. There was room for more guides and boatmen, and Matt and his family might turn out better than they looked. If they proved to be honest, industrious people who were willing to work for a living, Mr. Hastings was perfectly willing that they should stay, and he knew

that Mr. Wayring would provide a house and garden for them. If they proved to be objectionable in any way, it would be an easy matter to get rid of them.

Shortly after Mr. Hastings passed out of sight Matt Coyle wanted a drink; and he found it—not in the lake, or in the ice-cold spring from which the guides obtained their supply of water, but in a jug which he fished out from a lot of miscellaneous rubbish in the punt. After he had quenched his thirst he passed the jug over to his wife and boys, the whole proceeding being witnessed by Nat Clark, the oldest man and best guide and boatman in the settlement, who was getting his skiff ready to take out a fishing party from one of the hotels.

“Look a yer, friend,” said Nat. “What you got into that there jug o’ your’n?”

“The best kind o’ whisky,” answered Matt Coyle, cheerfully. “An’ I’ve got as much as half a bar’l more in the punt. Want a drop?”

“Not much,” replied Nat, emphatically. “An’ if you’re goin’ to stay about yer, you’d best knock in the head of that there bar’l an’

smash that there jug without wastin' no time."

"What fur?" demanded the red-nosed man, who was very much surprised.

"'Cause why, it's agin the law fur stuff of that kind to be brung into these yer grounds."

"Who made that there law?"

"The trustees. You'd best do as I tell you, 'cause if they find out that you've got it, they'll spill the last drop of it fur you."

"They will, eh?" exclaimed Matt. "I'd like to see 'em try it on. They'd better not try to boss me, 'cause me an' my boys have got rifles into the punt, an' we know how to use 'em too. Them there trustees ain't got no more right to say what I shall drink than they have to say what I shall eat. Besides, how are they goin' to find out that I have got it?"

"I shan't tell 'em, 'cause I've got enough to do without botherin' my head with other folks's business," answered the guide, who knew by the tone in which they were uttered that there was a threat hidden under Matt Coyle's last words. "But you can't keep it

hid from 'em, an' they're bound to find it out."

And sure enough they did.

Having built his shanty and moved his household goods into it, Matt Coyle and his boys presented themselves before the manager of the Lambert House and demanded employment as guides and boatmen. That functionary, who did not know that there were any such disreputable looking people in town, gazed at them in surprise, and told them rather bluntly that he had nothing for them to do. The manager of the Mount Airy House told them the same thing. The hotel guides were neat in person and respectful in demeanor, and Matt and his boys were just the reverse. The managers would not insult their guests by giving them boats manned by such persons as they were. Matt and his boys were angry, of course, and after wasting the best portion of the day grumbling over their hard luck, they put the jug into the punt and started out on a fishing excursion. They came back with a good string, but the hotels and boarding-houses refused to purchase, because their guests, with

the assistance of the guides, kept the tables well supplied.

Things went on in this way for a month, during which Matt and his boys had twice been thrust into the calaboose for attempting to "run the town" to suit themselves, and at the end of that time the trustees decided that he and his family were of no use in Mount Airy, and that they had better go somewhere else. On the day the lawn tennis party was held, a notice to Matt Coyle to pull down his shanty and vacate the ground of which he had taken unauthorized possession, was given to a constable, and Tom Bigden and his cousins happened along just as the officer had begun to read it to him. The boys knew that there was something going on in the settlement before they came within sight of it, for when the officer took the notice from his pocket the squatter declared that he would not have any papers served on him : and then followed a loud and angry altercation in which Matt Coyle and his family, the constable and half a dozen guides took part. Tom and his companions quickened their pace to a run, and arrived upon the scene

just in time to hear the squatter say, in savage tones :

“ I know what’s into that there paper, an’ I tell you agin that I won’t listen to it. Some of them rich fellers up there on the hill want me to go away from here, but I tell you I won’t do it. I’ve got just as much right—”

“ Keep still, can’t you ? ” shouted the officer. He had to shout in order to make himself heard, for Matt Coyle’s voice was almost as loud as a fog whistle. “ I am going to read this notice whether you listen or not.”

“ No, I won’t listen,” roared the squatter, swinging his arms around his head. “ I’ve got just as much right on this here ’arth as them rich folks up on the hill have. Where shall I go if I leave here ? ”

“ I am sure I don’t care where you go,” replied the officer. “ But you are not wanted in Mount Airy and you can’t stay.”

“ But I tell you I will stay, too,” shouted Matt, who was so nearly beside himself that Tom and his companions looked for nothing but to see him assault the officer. Probably he would have laid violent hands upon him had it

not been for the presence of the stalwart guides, who stood close behind him. "I came here 'cause I heared that there was plenty that an honest, hard-workin' man could do."

"And so there is," answered the constable, "but you are neither honest nor hard-working."

"They wouldn't have me an' my boys fur guides, 'cause we didn't have no fine clothes to wear," continued Matt. "An' nuther would they buy the fish we ketched, 'cause—look a yer. You needn't try to read that there paper to me, 'cause I won't listen to it, I tell you."

But the constable, who had grown tired of talking, paid no attention to him. He read the notice, raising his voice as often as the squatter raised his; then Matt's boys, and finally his wife came to his assistance, and this started the guides, who flourished their fists in the air and shouted until they were red in the face. Among them all they raised a fearful hubbub, and, of course, the officer's voice was entirely inaudible; but he read calmly on, and when he had finished the document he walked away, followed by the guides, and leaving the squatter and his family in a

towering rage. Ralph and Loren were afraid of them now that the constable and his broad-shouldered backers were gone, but Tom looked serenely on, and could hardly resist the impulse to laugh outright when he saw Matt and his family stamping about, shaking their clenched hands in the air, and acting altogether as though they had taken leave of their senses.

"Let's get away from here," whispered Loren, when Matt made a sudden and furious rush toward the shanty, and began trying to kick the side of it in with his heavy boots, just to show how mad he was, and to give his wife and boys some idea of the damage he would do if he only possessed the power.

"What's your hurry?" asked Tom, indifferently. "Can't you see how we can turn this to our advantage?"

"I can see that those people are in a terrible rage," replied Loren, who was really alarmed, "and I am afraid they will turn on us next."

"There's no danger of that," answered Tom, confidently. "When men rant and rave in that way they are not to be feared for any thing

they may do openly. They are the ones who work in secret."

At this moment Matt Coyle became aware that he and his family were not alone—that there were three interested spectators close at hand ; and as if to show Tom that he was mistaken in the opinions to which he had just given expression, Matt rushed toward him as if he meant to annihilate him, followed by all the members of his family, who shook their fists and shouted as if they were very angry indeed. Ralph and Loren shrank back, but Tom, who was nobody's coward, stood his ground, looked squarely into Matt's eyes, and coolly put his hands into his pockets.

"What you standin' here gapin' at?" demanded the squatter, fiercely. He had drawn back his fist with the full intention of striking Tom ; but when he saw that the boy did not appear to be at all afraid of him, he thought better of it.

"Why do you come at us in that savage way?" demanded Tom. "We don't scare worth a cent. If you want to get even with any one for the shameful manner in which you

have been treated, there's the man you must go for," he added, pointing toward the grove which concealed Mr. Wayring's house from view. "He is entirely to blame for all the trouble you have had. Your cabin is on his land, and the trustees never would have thought of ordering you off if he had not complained of you."

Matt and his family were greatly astonished. They thought that every one in town looked down on them because they were poor, but here was somebody who sympathized with them. Tom, quick to see that he had made an impression upon the angry squatter, went on to say—

"If the people of this village should treat me as they have treated you, it would make a regular Ishmaelite of me."

"What sort of a feller is that?" asked Matt.

"Why, Ishmael was a hunter who lived a good many years ago," answered Tom. "His hand was against every man, and every man's hand was against him. He didn't have a friend in the world."

"That's me," exclaimed Matt, who seemed

pleased to know that there was, or had been, at least one other man in existence who knew what trouble was. "I ain't got no friends nuther. These rich folks have tried to starve me since I came here, but they didn't do it—not by a long shot."

"Now, if I were situated as you are," continued Tom, "I would draw a bee-line for Sherwin's pond—"

"Where's that?" inquired Matt.

"It lies off that way, fifteen miles from the head of this lake," replied Tom, indicating the direction with his finger, and wondering at the same time how Matt could have expected to render acceptable service as guide to the guests of the hotels, when he was not acquainted with the surrounding country. "There are about twelve miles of rapids in the stream that connects the lake with Sherwin's pond, but your punt will go through easy enough if you can keep her clear of the rocks. As I was saying, I would go down there, put up my cabin and live in peace. I'd make more money, too, than I could by acting as guide and boatman."

"How would you do it?" asked the squatter, whose anger was all gone now.

"Simply by keeping my eyes open. You see those sail-boats anchored out there? Well, if one of them should happen to get adrift some stormy night, and come safely through the rapids into the pond and I should catch it, I wouldn't give it up until I got a big reward for saving it, would I? Then again, the pointers, setters and hounds that hunt in these fields and woods very often get lost, and their owners are willing to give almost any price to get them back. I tell you," exclaimed Tom, who knew by the gleam of intelligence that appeared on the swarthy faces before him that Matt and his family understood him perfectly, "I could make plenty of money by taking up my abode down there on the shore of that pond. If the things I have been talking about didn't happen of themselves, I'd *make* them happen—do you see? Well, good-by, and remember that we three boys had no hand in driving you out of Mount Airy."

So saying Tom walked off followed by his companions, while Matt and his family faced about and went toward their shanty.

CHAPTER VI.

TOM'S PLANS ARE UPSET.

FOR a while the three boys walked along in silence, Loren and Ralph being too amazed to speak, and Tom pluming himself on having done something that would, in the end, bring Joe Wyring and some of the other boys he disliked no end of trouble. The fact that it might bring trouble to himself as well, never once entered his mind. Ralph was the first to speak.

"I wouldn't have had that thing happen for any thing," said he.

"What thing?" demanded Tom.

"Why, that interview with the squatter. I could see, by the expression on his face, that you put the very mischief into his head."

"And that was just what I meant to do," replied Tom, who laughed heartily when he saw how troubled his cousins were over what

he had said to Matt Coyle. "I saw he was thick-headed and needed help, and so I gave it to him."

"But don't you know that it is dangerous to trust a man like that? If he gets into trouble through the suggestions you made to him—and he will just as surely as he attempts to act upon them—he'll blow the whole thing."

"What in the world has he got to blow, and how have I trusted him?" asked Tom, rather sharply. "I didn't tell him to turn the sailboats adrift or to steal the guests' hunting-dogs, did I? I simply told him what I should do if I were in his place."

"But you intended it for a suggestion, and hoped he would act upon it, didn't you?"

"Well, *that's* a different matter," answered Tom. "If he tries to revenge himself upon the citizens of Mount Airy for refusing to employ him or to buy his fish, and his efforts in that direction bring him into trouble, it will be his own fault. You and I want to see some of these conceited fellows, who think they know more and are better than any body else, brought down a peg or two, and if that squatter is

accommodating enough to do the work for us—why, I say let him do it.”

Tom continued to talk in this way for a long time, and to such good purpose that when they reached home his cousins had forgotten their fears, and even expressed much interest and curiosity regarding the course of action that Matt Coyle might see fit to pursue. If he followed Tom's suggestion and built his shanty on the shore of Sherwin's pond, they might expect to hear from him before many days more had passed away.

“I hope that if Matt does take it into his head to do any thing, he'll run off Wayring's sail-boat,” said Loren, gazing proudly at his own beautiful little sloop, which rode at her moorings in front of the boat-house. He had brought her up there on purpose to beat the *Young Republic*, which was said to be one of the swiftest boats on the lake ; but the first time they came together under sail, the *Republic* had run away from her would-be rival with all ease, and it began to look as though the “Challenge Cup” would become Joe's own property. He had won it twice, and if he won

it again it would be his to keep. There were those in the village who didn't want to see him get it. They had expected great things of the *Uncle Sam*—that was the name of Loren's boat—and indeed she did look like a "flyer"; but when they witnessed the short race, which Joe Wayring purposely brought about one afternoon to test the *Uncle Sam's* speed, they were much disappointed, and told one another that the cup was Joe's for a certainty.

"If Matt will only take that boat, I'll win the next regatta," continued Loren. "If he does take her, Joe will never see her again, for she will be smashed to pieces in the rapids."

"If I could have my way, I should prefer to have Matt run off Joe's Rob Roy, for then you and Ralph would stand a chance of winning some of the canoe races," observed Tom. "But, of course, he couldn't steal the canoe without breaking into the boat-house, and that would send him up for burglary."

"Oh, no; he won't do that," exclaimed Loren.

Tom made no audible reply, but to himself he said :

"I don't suppose he will ; but *I* might do it,

and let Joe and the rest blame Matt Coyle for it."

There were still several hours of daylight left, and for want of some better way of passing the time, as well as to put themselves in trim for the coming canoe meet, Tom and his cousins decided that they would spend the rest of the afternoon on the water. Ever since their canoes came into their possession they had been assiduously practicing with their double paddles, and Tom, who was quick to learn any thing that required strength and skill for its execution, was fast becoming an expert canoeist. In a hurry-scurry or portage race he could beat either of his cousins, and on this particular afternoon he wanted to try an upset race, of which he had that day heard for the first time.

"I saw an upset race rowed, or rather paddled, during the meet of the American Canoe Association at Lake George last summer, and I wonder that I didn't think to speak of it," said Ralph. "Well, better late than never. We will go up to the head of the lake, where no one will be likely to see us, and make our first

trial. We are all good swimmers, and it seems to me that we ought to make good time. The secret lies in getting back into our canoes after we have upset them. If we can learn to do that easily and quickly, we will stand a chance of putting Joe Wayring to his mettle, even if we don't beat him in the race."

The boys went into the boat-house by a side door, and about ten minutes afterward the front door swung open, and two Shadow canoes and one Rob Roy were pushed into the water, and as many young fellows, dressed in light gymnastic suits, sprang into them and paddled up the lake. They met a few sailing parties, who waved their handkerchiefs and hats to them as they shot by, and at the end of half an hour reached a wide and deep cove near the head of the lake. This was their practice ground. They had chosen it for that purpose because it was a retired spot, and so effectually concealed by the long, wooded point at the entrance, that a fleet of boats might have sailed by without knowing that there was any one in the cove.

"We'll start from this side and go across and

back, as we have done heretofore," said Ralph, who led the way in his Rob Roy. "We'll upset twice—once while we are going, and once while we are coming."

"But how does a fellow get into his canoe after he gets out of it?" inquired Tom.

"The rule is to climb in over the stern and work your way to your seat," replied Ralph. "But at Lake George I saw some of the contestants throw themselves across the cock-pit and get in that way. We'll try both plans, and each fellow can adopt the one that suits him best."

When the boys had taken up their positions at safe distances from one another, Ralph gave a shrill whistle and away they started, the light Rob Roy taking the lead with Tom close behind. A few minutes' work with the double paddles brought them to the middle of the cove, and then Ralph uttered another whistle. An instant later the three canoeists were in the water. The Rob Roy turned completely over and came right side up in a twinkling; and at the same moment Ralph's head bobbed up close alongside. He threw himself across the cock-

pit and climbed in with the greatest ease ; and while bailing out the water with a tin basin that was tied to one of the timbers of the canoe so that it could not float away or fill and sink, he looked complacently at his companions, who were making desperate efforts to regain their seats by climbing over the sterns of their respective crafts.

“ Grab hold of the side of your canoe, draw yourself as far as you can out of the water, turn a hand-spring and land on your feet in the cock-pit,” shouted Ralph, addressing himself to no one in particular. “ I saw that done at Lake George last summer by two or three different men.”

“ Suppose you do it yourself and show us how,” answered Tom, who having at last succeeded in gaining the deck, was slowly working his way toward his seat ; but instead of sitting astride of his canoe, as he ought to have done, he tried to make headway on his hands and knees in order to beat Loren, who was making all haste to reach the cock-pit of his own craft. In his eagerness Tom forgot how cranky his canoe was, and, neglecting to trim

her properly, she turned over and let him down into the water again.

Ralph, of course, could have won the race very easily, but he lingered to watch the others, so that they all reached the turning point at the same moment. On the home stretch another upset occurred, and this time Tom and Loren did not waste as many minutes in getting back as they did before. They learned rapidly, and when half a dozen more races had been tried they became so expert that Ralph had little the advantage of them. By this time they began to think they had had enough of the water for one afternoon, so they pulled away for the boat house, Tom easily distancing his cousins, who tried in vain to keep up with him.

"This afternoon's work has opened my eyes to a thing or two," said Ralph, after they had changed their clothes and sponged out their canoes.

"So it has mine," exclaimed Tom. "Let me talk first, and see how far my conclusions agree with yours. In the first place, you ought to win the upset race "

"That's my opinion," said Loren. "He shall win it, too, if strategy is of any use."

"You are no sooner out of your canoe than you are back into it again," continued Tom. "I am sure that neither Wayring, Hastings nor Sheldon can do better than that. I only wish you had a little more muscle."

"But I haven't got it and can't get it between this time and the race, and so you fellows will have to help me."

"Trust us for that," answered Tom. "Then we'll turn to and foul the best contestant in the hurry-scurry race, so that Loren can win that; and if you will lend me your Rob Roy, I'll take my chances on carrying off the honors in the portage race."

"That is just the way I had planned it," exclaimed Ralph. "We'll show these fellows who think themselves so smart, that there are others in the world who are quite as smart as they are."

It was a very pretty programme, no doubt, but it never occurred to Tom and his cousins that possibly the boys to whom Prime was to introduce them the next day, might not think

favorably of it. There were those among them who had never been first in any race, although they were very expert canoeists ; and it was not at all likely that they would consent to see these new-comers carry off the prizes for which they had contended ever since the club was organized.

Tom and his cousins were tired enough to rest now, and they found it lounging in their hammocks under the trees, and watching the boats that passed up and down the lake. They took another short run in their canoes by moonlight, spent the next forenoon sailing about in Loren's sloop, and at one o'clock bent their steps toward the store where they were to meet George Prime and his friends. When they arrived at the place where Matt Coyle's shanty stood the day before, they were surprised as well as delighted to find that it wasn't there.

"He's gone, as sure as the world," cried Ralph. "Now we shall very soon know whether or not he has the pluck to do any thing to the men who would not give him a chance to earn an honest living."

Tom laughed loudly.

“Did you really think I was in earnest when I told Matt yesterday that I thought he had been shamefully treated?” said he, as soon as he could speak. “Why, Ralph, I thought you had more sense. I said that just to make him mad. If I succeeded, he will do the work that we would otherwise have been obliged to do ourselves.”

When they reached the drug-store they found Prime waiting for them. After he had treated them to a cigar apiece, he led them through a rear door into a store-room, where they discovered a dozen or more fellows perched upon boxes and barrels, each one puffing vigorously at a cigar or pipe. They were engaged in a very earnest conversation which they brought to a sudden close when the door opened.

“Here they are,” exclaimed Prime, as the boys arose to their feet and took their pipes and cigars out of their mouths. “Tom Bigden, and his cousins Ralph and Loren Farnsworth; gentlemen. I believe you have met some of my friends before at lawn parties, ball matches and

the like," added Prime, addressing himself to the new-comers.

"I had the good fortune to meet them yesterday at Miss Arden's," said one of the boys, Frank Noble by name, advancing and shaking Tom and his cousins by the hand. "And I also had the pleasure of putting them to their speed one day last week, when I happened to catch them out on the lake with their canoes. You ought to make a good one," he added, turning to Tom. "I could see by the way you made that Shadow spin through the water that you've got the muscle. All you want is practice. If you keep it up, you can go in next year with some hope of winning."

Tom was somewhat disconcerted by these words, and so were Ralph and Loren, if one might judge by the blank look on their faces. It was clear to them that there were others besides themselves who wanted prizes, and who looked to their friends to assist them in winning those prizes.

"I thank you for your compliment and for your words of encouragement," replied Tom, concealing his disappointment as well as he

could, and turning to shake hands with another boy he had met at the lawn party on the previous day, "but I am going to win the portage race this year."

"And if I don't come in first in the paddle race, it will not be because I do not try my level best," added Loren.

"And I'm going to give somebody a pull for the upset race," chimed in Ralph.

It was now Noble's turn to be astonished. He looked inquiringly at Prime, and Prime looked at Tom and his cousins. The latter saw very plainly that while they were laying their plans they had interfered with arrangements that had already been made by the boys by whom they were surrounded, but they were none the less determined to have their own way in the matter. Tom, who could hardly conceal the rage that had taken possession of him, resolved then and there that he would stick to his programme, no matter what promises he might be obliged to make to the contrary. He was like an Indian, in one respect: When he wanted a thing he wanted it with his whole heart, and he wanted it immediately. He

wanted a prize to show to his city friends when they came to visit him, and he wanted the honors that prize would bring him.

"Well—yes," said Prime, who knew that Noble and the rest expected him to say something. "We'd like to have you win under different circumstances, but as it is, I think—you see—look here ; I suppose you are with us against Wayring and the other fellows who have been walking off with the prizes every year since the club had an existence !"

"Certainly I am," answered Tom. "We all are, and we're going to do the best we can to beat them, too. Didn't you tell us no longer ago than yesterday that you wished we would come into the club and make Joe Wayring lower his broad pennant for a while?" he added, turning to Prime.

"I did ; but I have had opportunity to talk the matter over with my friends since then, and we have decided that those who have worked so long and so hard for the prizes, ought to have them in preference to any newcomers."

"All right," said Tom, silencing by a look

the words of indignant protest that arose to Ralph's lips and Loren's. "Who comes in for the paddle race?"

"I do," said Noble.

"And who is put down for the upset race?" continued Tom.

Bob Lord said that he was; and a young fellow named Scott volunteered the information that his friends had decided that he ought to be allowed to win the portage race, because he came so near winning it fairly the year before.

"Then it seems that my cousins and I are to be left out in the cold," observed Tom, who was mad enough to break things.

"By no means," some of the boys hastened to explain. "There are some handsome prizes offered for the sailing races, and we intend that you shall win them if we can make you do it."

"Don't want 'em," said Tom, gruffly. "Couldn't enter for them if we did."

"Why not?"

"Because we bought our canoes for exploring purposes, and not for sailing. We received such contradictory advice from those to whom we applied for information, that it was all we

could do to make up our minds what kind of canoes to get; and when it came to the sails, we thought we would let them go until we could decide upon the style of rig we needed without asking any one's advice. We may make up our minds that we don't want any sails at all."

"Oh, you mustn't do that," exclaimed Noble, "for if you do you will lose half the sport of canoeing. By the way, the club meets Saturday evening, and if you say so, I will take in your names."

"I am obliged to you," replied Tom. "But we had about half agreed with Wayring and Hastings to propose us for membership."

Ralph and Loren were greatly astonished, and Prime and his friends saw that they were.

"I am sorry you did that," said Noble. "Every one of us here present has pledged himself not to vote for any thing brought forward by Wayring and his crowd."

"I did it before I knew what sort of boys they were," said Tom, apologetically, "and I don't like to go back from my word. Are you going to black-ball us for it?"

“By no means,” exclaimed all the boys, in a breath.

“We want you to help us carry out our programme,” added George Prime.

“Well, all the help you will get from me won’t amount to much, you may be sure of that,” said Tom, to himself; and his cousins were so well acquainted with him that they could tell pretty nearly what he was thinking about.

“Have you spoken to Wayring about proposing you for the yacht club?” asked Scott.

Tom, with unblushing mendacity, replied that he had.

“I don’t believe the regatta will amount to much this year,” remarked one of the boys who had not spoken before. “If Matt Coyle carries out the threats he made yesterday, there won’t be any yachts to contend for the prizes. You heard about that, I suppose?” he added, turning to Tom and his cousins.

“We were present when a legal process of some kind was served on him yesterday, and we heard Matt say that he wouldn’t go away,” answered Loren. “But when we came around

the foot of the lake a little while ago, we found that he had cleared out, taking his shanty with him."

"You saw the constable serve him with a notice to quit, did you!" exclaimed Noble. "Well, you missed the best part of it. You ought to have been there about three hours later, and witnessed the fight that took place between Matt and his family, and the officer and his posse. The old woman proved herself to be the best man in the lot. Matt evidently knew that an effort would be made to eject him by force, and his wife prepared for it by boiling a big kettle of water. When the constable, with a crowd of guides at his back, presented himself at the door, she opened on him with that hot water; and if you could have seen the stampede that followed, you would have laughed until your sides ached, as I did."

"You didn't laugh much when it happened," Prime remarked. "I was there, and I know there wasn't a man or boy in the party who showed a neater pair of heels than one Frank Noble."

When the burst of merriment that followed these words, and in which Frank joined as heartily as any of his companions, had somewhat subsided, the narrator continued :

“ I am free to confess that I didn't see any thing funny in the way the old woman jammed that long-handled dipper into the kettle and sent its boiling contents flying toward us, but it was very amusing after it was all over, and I woke up in the night and laughed about it. Of course the defiant squatters were overpowered after a while, but not until Matt and both his boys had been knocked flat, and one of the guides had disarmed the old woman by running in and kicking over her kettle of water. The officer was determined to arrest the last one of them for resisting his authority ; but Mr. Hastings, who happened along just then, and who thought that neighbors so undesirable could not be got rid of any too quick, told the constable to chuck the squatter and all his belongings into the punt and shove them out into the lake, after giving them fair warning that they would be sent up as vagrants if they stopped this side of Sherwin's pond.”

“Did he do it?” asked Ralph.

“Of course he did. But before Matt put his oars into the water he made us a speech containing threats which I, for one, hope he will have the courage to carry out.”

Here Noble stopped to light his cigar which had gone out while he was talking.

CHAPTER VII.

A DOG WITH A HISTORY.

“ YOU don’t want to say that out loud, Frank,” observed Scott.

“ Say what out loud ? ” demanded Noble, after he had taken a few long pulls at his cigar to make sure that it was going again.

“ That you hope Matt Coyle will have the courage to carry out the threats he made yesterday.”

“ Of course not. But I can express my honest sentiments here, for we are all friends, I take it. Matt’s speech was a short one,” said Noble, once more addressing himself to Tom Bigden and his cousins, “ but it was to the point. ‘ You see all them there sail-boats ridin’ at anchor, an’ all them fine houses up there on the hill ? ’ said Matt. ‘ Wal, the boats’ll sink if there’s holes knocked into ’em,

an' the houses'll burn if there's a match sot to 'em, I reckon.' Good-by till you hear from me agin.' He hasn't got a very handsome face at any time, Matt hasn't, and his intense rage, and the black and blue lump as big as a hen's egg, which had been raised on one of his cheeks by a whack from a guide's fist, made him look like a savage in his war-paint. He was in dead earnest when he uttered the words, and if the Mount Airy boys, and men too, who have incurred his enmity don't hear from him again, I shall be surprised."

"And disappointed as well," added Prime.

"I didn't say that," replied Noble.

"Of course you didn't. Nobody said it, but I think we understand one another."

Ralph and Loren looked frightened, while Tom drew admiring applause from the boys and gave expression to his feelings at the same time by dancing a few steps of a hornpipe.

"Well, we must be off," said he, suddenly.

"Another engagement, you know."

"What's your hurry," exclaimed Prime.

"Stay and smoke another cigar."

"Can't," replied Tom, turning a significant

look upon Loren and Ralph, who wondered what new idea he had got into his head. "We'll go and see Wayring according to promise, and then start for home."

"But we haven't said a word about organizing that new archery club," interposed Noble. "Prime told us that you three fellows were strongly in favor of it."

"So we are," was Tom's reply ; "and some day, when we have plenty of leisure, we'll talk it over. We are happy to have met you, and will now say good-by until we see you again."

So saying, Tom bowed himself out of the store-room followed by his cousins, who could hardly hold their tongues until they reached the street, so impatient were they to know what he was going to do now. They were certain of one thing, and that was, that Tom did not think as much of George Prime and his friends as he thought he was going to.

"I am disgusted," declared Loren, as soon as they were safely out of hearing.

"Not with me, I hope," said his cousin.

"Yes, with you and with the fellows we have just left."

Tom thrust his hands deep into his pockets, looked up at the clouds and laughed heartily.

"I expected it," said he; then he stopped laughing and scowled fiercely. His merriment was forced, and he was as angry as he ever got to be.

"Are you willing that Prime and his crowd should lay out a programme for the races without saying a word to us about it?" demanded Ralph, who forgot that that was just the way in which he and his two companions had treated Prime.

"And did you really ask Wayring to propose our names at the club's next meeting?" chimed in Loren.

"No, to both your questions," replied Tom, emphatically. "They must be a bright set of boys if they think we are going to let them rule us. Why, that was the reason we decided that we did not want any thing to do with Wayring and his followers. But I have thought better of that resolution, and I'm going to make friends with Joe if I can."

"And cut Prime and the rest?" exclaimed Ralph.

“Not directly. Look here,” said Tom, suddenly stopping in the middle of the sidewalk and facing his cousins. “We’ve got our choice between two cliques, both of which have showed a disposition to make us do as they say. Now which one shall we take up with? I prefer Joe’s. He and his friends are in the majority, and they are not one bit more overbearing than Prime and *his* friends. Besides, they will let us win a race if we can do it fairly, but the crowd we have just left want all the honors themselves.”

“If you try to carry water on both shoulders you will be sure to spill some of it,” observed Loren.

“I’ll risk that,” replied Tom, confidently. “I didn’t ask Joe to take our names in to the club, but I’m going to before I am ten minutes older.”

“Why didn’t you ask Prime or Noble to take them in?” inquired Ralph.

“Because I didn’t want Joe to know that we had become intimate enough with those two boys to ask favors of them. Now, then, here we are. You know Joe invited us to call as

often as we could, so we are sure of a welcome if he is at home. Stand ready to back me, if you think circumstances require it, but don't be surprised at any thing I say."

As Tom uttered these words he opened one of the wide gates that gave entrance into Mr. Wayring's grounds, and the three walked up the carriage way toward the house, until their progress was stopped by the sudden appearance of one of Joe's pets—a Newfoundland dog, which came out from among the evergreens and stood in their path. He was a noble-looking fellow, and although he was gray with age, the attitude of defiance he assumed seemed to say that he considered himself quite as able to keep intruders off those premises as he had been during his younger days.

"Come on," shouted a familiar voice. "Mars won't trouble you. He don't like tramps," added Joe Wayring, leaning his double paddle against the side of the house, and coming forward to greet his visitors. "But fellows like you could go all over the place; and so long as you did not pick up any thing, Mars would not say a word to you. How are

you, any way; and where are you going on foot? Why didn't you come over in your canoes, so that we could have a little race all by ourselves? Come on. Sheldon and Hastings are down to the boat-house waiting for me."

"We came over to ask a favor of you," replied Tom, as soon as Joe gave him a chance to speak. "Would you mind taking in our names at the next meeting of the canoe club?"

"On the contrary, I shall be pleased to do it," answered Joe, readily. "You have been pretty sly since your canoes came to hand, but we know more about you than you think we do," he added, as he led the way through the carriage-porch and down the terraced bank toward the boat-house.

"I don't quite understand you," said Tom.

"I mean that we have watched you while you were taking your morning and evening spins up and down the lake, and we have come to the conclusion that some of us are going to get beaten. I'll say this much for you, Big-

den : I never saw a Shadow canoe get through the water, until I saw yours going down the lake yesterday afternoon."

"Thank you," said Tom. "Do you know who are booked for winners this year?"

"Booked!" repeated Joe. "There's nobody booked. The best men will win, as they always have done."

"I am afraid you are mistaken."

"Oh, no; I guess not. We don't have any jockeying here, and if any member of the club should so far forget himself as to interfere with one of the contestants, he would never row another race on this lake."

"I know some boys who are going to take their chances on it," said Tom, quietly.

"On fouling the head man so that somebody else can win?" cried Joe.

"That's just what I mean."

Joe could hardly believe his ears, and neither could Loren and Ralph believe theirs. This, then, was what Tom meant when he cautioned them against being surprised at any thing he might say! They *were* surprised—they couldn't help it; and in order that Joe might not see

their faces they fell behind, and allowed him and Tom to go on ahead.

“You know boys who are going to try to win by foul means!” repeated Joe. “I didn’t suppose that there was any one in the club who would be so mean. It is true that last year a certain canoeist persisted in keeping as close to me as he could, and drove the bow of his craft toward the stern of my own as often as he got the chance; but I thought it was accident, while some of my friends on shore declared that it was his intention to run into me, and claim the race because I got in his way. But, as luck would have it, I was able to paddle fast enough to keep out of his road. It seems to me that if I couldn’t win a prize fairly, I shouldn’t want to win it at all.”

“I know who that fellow was,” said Tom, “and I know, also, that he tried his very best to foul you. It was Prime. I heard all about it.”

Tom and his cousins supposed that Joe’s next question would be: Who told you about this plot, and what are the names of the boys who are “booked” to win by fair means or

foul? But greatly to their surprise Joe propounded no such inquiry. The latter knew very well that if some one had not reposed confidence in him, Tom never would have heard of any plot; and Joe was too much of a gentleman to ask him to violate that confidence. He wanted to turn the conversation into another channel, and so he began talking about Mars, who was walking along the path before them.

“That fellow is the only foreigner in the party,” said Joe. “He was born and received the rudiments of his education on the bleak shores of Newfoundland.”

“Then how did you come to get hold of him?” inquired Tom.

“I was up there two winters ago with my uncle, hunting caribou.”

“What sort of an animal is that?” asked Tom. He spoke before he thought, and was provoked at himself for it. He did not want to be constantly asking information of a boy who never came to him for any. As Tom would have expressed it: “He didn’t care to make Joe and his friends any more conceited than they were already.” Joe, however, was not at

all conceited ; but if Tom Bigden had known as much as he did, and been as expert in all sorts of athletic sports, he would have thought himself too grand to associate with common fellows.

“The caribou is the American reindeer, but it is not broken to harness like the European animal of the same species,” replied Joe. “It is hunted as game, and Nova Scotia, New-Brunswick and Newfoundland are the best places to go to find it. Uncle Joe went up there two years ago, taking Hastings, Sheldon and myself with him. We went in a little fishing schooner that was bound from Gloucester to the Bay of Fundy for swordfish.”

Tom would have been glad to know where the Bay of Fundy was, and what the schooner’s crew intended to do with the swordfish after they caught them, but his pride would not let him ask. The sequel proved that it was not necessary, for Joe went on to explain.

“The Bay of Fundy runs up between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, as you of course know as well as I do, and the fish are used for food. When they are put on the market they

are sliced up like halibut. They are caught with harpoons. They are ugly, I tell you, and when one of them weighing four hundred pounds comes flopping over the rail and begins to swing that sword of his around like lightning, you may be sure that he gets all the room he wants."

"What do you do with the swords after they are taken off?"

"Keep them as curiosities or sell them, just as you please. There is great demand for them. I have one that I should not like to part with. It belonged to a two hundred pounder. The sailors thought they had killed him before they hauled him aboard; but he gave one expiring flop after he reached the deck, and the point of his sword cut a big hole in the leg of my trowsers. If I had been a little closer to him, he might have injured me very badly. If a man had his only weapon of offense and defense made fast to his nose, he wouldn't do much with it, would he? But it just suits the swordfish, which, according to Captain Davis, delivers his blows so rapidly that he will kill half a dozen out of a school

of albicore before they can get out of his reach."

"But what has all this got to do with Mars?" inquired Tom.

"I came pretty near forgetting about him, didn't I?" said Joe, with a laugh. "Well, we went back to Gloucester with Captain Davis, who, as soon as he had disposed of his swordfish, fitted out for the banks—for codfish, you know—and went with him. He was to land us at some little fishing hamlet, whose name I have forgotten, where we were to obtain guides and go back into the interior after caribou; but he managed to run the schooner ashore in a thick fog, and there we stuck until Mars brought off a line to us. That was all that saved us. The sailors hauled in on it, and finally brought aboard a larger and stronger line to which a hawser was made fast. We took a turn with that around the capstan, and after a good deal of hard work, succeeded in pulling the schooner over the bar into deeper water nearer the shore. We got off just in the nick of time, too; for that night a storm came up, and raised a sea that would have made

short work with us if we had been exposed to its fury.”

“Were there men on shore opposite the place you struck?” inquired Tom.

“Certainly. If there hadn’t been, who would have tied the line to the dog’s collar and told him to take it out to us?”

“I should think they would have gone to your assistance in their boats,” replied Tom.

“So they would, under ordinary circumstances ; but no boat that was ever built could have lived a moment in the surf that was breaking over the bar when we ran on to it. I don’t understand to this day how Mars managed to get through it. I have seen him swim a good many times since that day, and in smooth water he doesn’t seem to be any better than any other dog. It is when the wind is blowing and the white caps are running that he shows what he can do. Uncle Joe was so well pleased with the dog’s performance that as soon as he could find his owner, he offered to buy him. Of course the man didn’t want to sell, but he was poor, and when he thought of the comforts that the hun-

dred dollars which uncle counted out before him would buy for his wife and children, he came to the conclusion that we could have the dog. He's mine now, for Uncle Joe gave him to me as soon as the bargain was struck."

"Did you get any caribou?"

"Plenty of them, and, would you believe it? we had to take along a supply of food for that dog the same as we did for ourselves. He wouldn't look at any thing except salt meat or codfish. I really believe he would have starved with a meal before him that would have made any other dog's mouth water. But he is civilized now, and takes his rations like other white folks. He's got a history, Mars has, and if his adventures and exploits were written out, they would make a good-sized book."

A loud and hearty greeting from the two boys who were standing on the dock in front of the boat-house, put a stop to the conversation. Tom and his cousins expected that the first thing Joe Wayring did would be to acquaint his two friends with the fact that a plot had been formed to keep the best man from winning at the next canoe meet, and to throw the dif-

ferent races to those who could not by any possibility win them fairly ; but again they were disappointed. Joe did not say a word on the subject, and the reason was because it was too serious a matter to be discussed in the presence of boys with whom he was so little acquainted.

“A dog that will fetch a bone will carry one,” was Joe’s mental comment. “Tom and his cousins may be friendly to us, and then again, if there is any truth in this report, they may have brought it to me on account of some spite they have against those from whom they got it. It’s best to keep on the safe side, and so I will hold my tongue until I have a chance to speak to Hastings and Sheldon in private. We have received warning, and if they beat us, it will be our own fault.”

“We were just going over to ask you three fellows to come out and take a spin with us,” exclaimed Hastings. “We have had our eyes on you, and to tell you the truth, we don’t quite like the way you handle those paddles of yours.”

“Of course we don’t ask you to do your best—indeed we would be foolish to expect it,”

chimed in Sheldon. "But still we should like to try a few short races with you, if you don't mind."

"We shall be glad of the chance to see how much we lack of being good canoeists," said Loren, readily. "We'll walk back and go around the foot of the lake—"

"Oh, no," interrupted Joe. "That's too hard work, and besides it would take up too much time. There's my skiff. We can put her into the water and step the mast in a minute, and she'll take you over flying. Come in here; I want to show you something. We three belong to the committee which was appointed to draw up a programme for the meet," added Joe, taking a folded paper from a little writing desk that stood in one corner of the boat-house, "and here's what we shall submit to the club at the next meeting."

Tom Bigden and the Farnsworth boys ran their eyes over the paper, and the only things they found in it that possessed any particular interest for them were the following :

"*Portage race*.—Paddle a quarter of a mile, carry canoe twenty-five yards over a stony

point, re-embark and paddle back to starting point.

Single paddling race.—Half a mile and return.

Hurry-Skurry race.—Run ten yards, swim twenty-five yards, paddle three hundred yards.

These were the ones, as we know, which Tom and his cousins had “booked” themselves to win. Then there were sailing races, tandem races, and boys and girls’ races; and the meet was to wind up with a greasy pole walk.

“You fellows must certainly enter for that,” said Sheldon. “You have no idea how much sport there is in it. Some of the Mount Airy people say that it is the best part of the performance.”

Tom replied that he did not know just what a greasy pole walk was, and reminded Sheldon that he and his cousins were not yet members of the club.

“But you will be members before the day set for the races, you may be sure of that,” said Joe. “I’ll propose you at the next meeting, and I know there will not be a dissenting vote.”

“I wish you could give us the same assurance in regard to the archery club,” said Tom.

“So do I, but I can’t,” answered Joe; and then, as if that were a subject that he could not talk about just at that time, he hastened to add: “I can soon tell you what a greasy pole walk is. Did you notice that high derrick built on the end of our pier? Well, a long, stout spar is run out from that derrick, and after being braced and guyed so securely that it will not sway about under any reasonable weight, it is thickly covered with slush to make it slippery. There is a prize of some sort at the outer end of it, and the boy who can walk along the pole and capture that prize before he falls off into the water, is the best fellow.”

“What is the prize?” inquired Ralph.

“Last year there were so many lucky fellows that we had to provide several of them,” was the reply. “The one that created the most fun was a pig in a bag. Noble captured that, and I tell you he had a time of it. You see, the pig was greased as well as the pole, and the bag was tied in such a way that when

Noble dived for it—that was the only way he could get hold of it, you know—the mouth of the bag opened and the pig slipped out. Then the uproar began. Noble, who is a plucky fellow and a splendid swimmer, didn't know that the pig was greased, and he tried for a long time to tow him ashore by one of his hind legs, but, of course, he couldn't do it. At last he began to suspect something, and the way he larruped that pig over the head with the bag to make him turn toward the shore, was a caution. He finally succeeded in his object, and the instant the pig's feet touched the beach, Noble sprung up, threw the bag over his head and secured him easy enough. Whatever you do, you mustn't miss the greasy pole walk."

"I suppose we shall be laughed at if we tumble off the pole into the water?"

"Certainly. That isn't down in the programme, but it is a part of it, all the same."

"How many trials does each contestant have?"

"Only two. You see, there are so many of us and so much fun in trying to secure the prize, that if we didn't set some limit to the

number of trials, the boys would keep on trying for an indefinite length of time.”

While the boys were talking in this way they had pushed Joe's skiff out of the boat-house into the water, stepped the mast and unfurled the sail that was wrapped around it. Every thing being ready for the start, the little fleet set out for the opposite side of the lake, Tom and his cousins in the skiff, and Joe and his companions in their canoes. The skiff was made fast to Mr. Bigden's pier, and a quarter of an hour later three more canoes shot out of the boat-house, and the trials of speed began. They continued nearly all the afternoon, and when the rival factions bade each other good-night and paddled off toward their respective boat-houses, there was a decided feeling of uneasiness among some of them, while the others were correspondingly confident and happy.

“It doesn't seem possible that this is Bigden's first season in a canoe,” said Sheldon, as soon as Tom and his cousins were out of hearing. “He is going to crowd the best of us this year, and if he keeps up his practice until the

next meet, there won't be a boy in the club who can touch him with a ten-foot pole. He's going to make an expert."

"I'll just tell you what's a fact," said Loren, after the canoes had been wiped out and hoisted in their slings, "I am not so much afraid of Joe and his crowd as I was. I don't think there will be any need of the fouling business. I kept pace with Hastings in spite of all he could do to shake me off, and could have passed him if I had let out a little more strength."

"That shows how much you know about these things," said Tom, in reply. "Do you suppose that Hastings did the best he could? I kept up with Joe without any very great exertion, but I don't crow over it. They had plenty of speed in reserve, but you will have to wait till the day of the races if you want to see what they are capable of."

The sequel proved that Tom was right.

CHAPTER VIII.

RUNNING THE RAPIDS.

“**N**OW that we are here by ourselves,” continued Ralph, “I’d like to ask you why you told Joe that the best man was not to be allowed to win at the next meet. I never heard of such a thing before in my life. What do you suppose Prime and his crowd would say to you if they should find it out?”

“I don’t believe they will ever find it out,” replied Tom, who did not seem to think that he had been guilty of any thing mean. “If I have formed a correct estimate of Joe Wayring’s disposition and character, he is a boy who knows how to hold his tongue. I posted him simply to off-set the coolness and impudence displayed by Prime and his friends in shutting us out of all the races, without so much as saying by your leave. Since they would not give us a chance to win some of the prizes, I say

that *they* shall not win *any* of them. We are not going to play into the hands of boys who work against us."

"That's what I say," exclaimed Loren. "But I thought Joe acted very indifferently."

"Because he did not ask me to go into the particulars of the scheme, and give him the names of the fellows who were in it?" said Tom. "I thought so myself at first, but after turning the matter over in my mind, I came to the conclusion that his indifference was put on; and that the reason he did not ask me to go into details was because he was afraid I would say to him that I was taught not to tell names and tales too."

"It seems to me that that is about the size of it," Loren remarked. "But look here, Tom. You have undertaken a pretty big contract if you expect to keep on the right side of both those crowds. One or the other of them will very soon have reason to suspect you, and then down you will go. What are you going to do about the races?"

"My proposition is, that we keep up our regular exercise and training, and do the best we can

to carry out our own programme, leaving Prime's clique and Joe's to carry out theirs, if they are able to do it. If we find that we stand no show, I would much rather see Joe and his friends win than Prime and *his* friends."

"So would I," said Ralph. "Now I should like to have some one tell me what excuse we have for being down on those boys. We got mad at them simply because they would not break their rules and take us into their archery club."

"And wasn't that reason enough?" cried Tom, hotly. "I wasn't used to such treatment while I lived in the city, and I won't submit to it now. I don't think any more of Hastings than I did on the day he so coolly told me that he would not help me get into their club. I don't care whether he wins or not. What I mean to say is, that Prime and the rest shall not carry off any of the prizes if I can help it. I intend to show them that the next time they want any help from me, they had better let me have a voice in making up the programme; and I shall do it in such a way that they can not possibly misunderstand

me. You two can do as you please, of course; but if you are going to weaken, I wish you would say so at once, so that I may make my arrangements accordingly."

Ralph and Loren hastened to assure their cousin that they had not the slightest intention of going back from their original agreement, and that they would stick to him through thick and thin, no matter what happened; but still they wished that Tom would learn to like Joe Wayring, and give up his idea of being revenged upon him for slights which were wholly imaginary. Joe had a much larger following than Prime and Noble, through him they could get more invitations to parties, picnics and hunting and fishing excursions than they could in any other way, and his influence might eventually gain for them an honor which they craved above all others—a membership in the Toxophilites; for those young ladies they met at Miss Arden's lawn party were handsome and stylish, that was a fact, and Ralph and Loren had more than once told themselves that they would even be willing to give up their cigars, if by so doing they

could win the privilege of shooting with those same young ladies twice a week. If they became intimate with George Prime, and were often seen in his company, the Toxophilites would drop them like so many hot potatoes; and then, when invitations for any social gathering were issued, they would be left out in the cold, the same as George was. But whatever they decided to do they must keep on the right side of Tom, for if they did not, he would be sure to make things unpleasant for them. It looked as though Ralph and Loren would have to do the very thing against which they had cautioned their vindictive relative, that is, try to carry water on both shoulders and take their chances of spilling some of it.

“Now we'll take Joe's skiff back and put it where we found it, provided the boat-house is open,” said Tom. “If there is any boy in the world who ought to be supremely happy, he is the fellow. He has every thing he can ask for, including a rich and good-natured uncle, who takes him off on hunting and fishing trips nearly every year. Why that boy, young as he is, has shot caribou and moose and caught salmon.”

Yes, Joe Wayring was happy, but it was not wholly on account of his pleasant surroundings. His source of happiness was within himself, and he knew it. He had been taught that lesson at the same time that he was being instructed in athletics and field-sports. He thought more of others than he did of Joe Wayring, and he would go into the dumps in a minute if he saw any of his friends in a disconsolate mood. If things didn't go right with him—and they went wrong sometimes, as they do with every body—it made no sort of difference with Joe's good-nature. He kept his troubles to himself; but Tom would get angry and go into the sulks and make all around him miserable. While going on the principle that whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well, Joe was nevertheless perfectly willing to be beaten by any one who could do it fairly; but Tom wanted to be first at any cost. This was the principal difference between the two boys.

Tom cast off the skiff's painter while Loren and Ralph stepped the mast and shook out the sail, and in twenty minutes more

- they found themselves in the boat-house, where Joe and his two friends were waiting for them.

“I saw you coming and took the cover off one of my pets so that you could take a look at her,” said the former, directing the attention of his visitors to a neat cedar shell in which he had been wont to win honors before he became a convert to canoeing. “She has taken me first by the judges’ boat in more than one hotly-contested race while I was going to school at Dartmouth Academy. Handsome, isn’t she? No doubt you will be surprised to hear me say it, but *there* is something that I think more of than I do of her.”

As Joe said this, he pointed toward an ungainly looking object which lay on the floor at the further end of the boat-house. It was a canvas canoe, whose battered sides bore evidence to numerous encounters with sharp-pointed rocks and snags.

“It must be on account of its associations,” replied Loren, looking first at the clumsy canoe and then at the clear-cut lines of the shell. “If I had my choice between the two,

it would not take me long to make up my mind which one I wanted."

"Of course not. There is as much difference between them as there is between a trotter and a plow-horse ; but each one has served the purpose for which it was intended, and served it well, too. I like the canoe better, because she was the first thing in the shape of a boat I ever owned. She has carried me a good many hundred miles, first and last, and although she has often got contrary and spilled me out into the water when I wasn't expecting it, I have had any amount of fun with her exploring creeks and ponds that I could not otherwise have reached. She is fourteen feet long, weighs fifty pounds fully equipped, and packs in that little chest you see there. I know she isn't very good-looking, but when it comes to running the rapids she is there, every time. That's the reason I took her out of the chest. We are going down to Sherwin's Pond to-morrow after bass ; will you join us ?"

Tom and his cousins replied that they would be glad to do so, and Joe went on to say :

"You see, the fishing in the pond is better

than it is in the lake. The people who come here to spend the summer do not often go down there, because there is no wagon road through the woods, and they are afraid to trust themselves to the rapids. Well, they are frightful to look at, that's a fact, but—"

"We know that very well," interrupted Ralph. "We have gone down there a dozen times with our minds fully made up that we would run those rapids, or smash our canoes in trying, and we have as often come back without making the attempt. When we reached the place where the water leaves the lake, and goes foaming and boiling over the rocks in the gorge below, our arms always went back on us."

"Your arms?" repeated Sheldon.

"Yes. Our hearts were brave enough for any thing, but our cowardly arms wouldn't pull the canoes into the rapids."

"Oh!" said Sheldon. "Well, your cowardly arms were the wisest part of you, for you certainly ought not to try to go through until you know where the channel is. Those rapids have been run hundreds of times, though not

always without accident to be sure, and if you will follow close in our wake to-morrow, we'll take you safely to the bottom."

"We must make an early start," said Hastings, "for we want to reach the pond just about the time the first rays of the sun strike the water. Can you be ready at four o'clock? All right. Catch a good supply of minnows to-night, and then you won't have to waste valuable time over it in the morning."

"And take the strongest and stiffest bait-rod you have," added Joe. "Leave your fly-rods, if you have any, at home, for you will have no use for them. About June 1st, when the bass season opens, those who know how to throw a fly have very fine fishing among the rocks close to the shore; but as the weather grows warmer the fish gradually draw off into deep water, and all the bass we shall catch to-morrow will be near the middle of the pond where the springs boil up."

"And don't forget your gun," said Sheldon.

"Nor your rubber blankets," chimed in Hastings.

"Do you think it will rain?" asked Ralph.

“We hope not, and indeed there are no signs of it. When we reach the head of the rapids we will pull off our heaviest clothing, so that we will be ready for a swim in case we are unlucky enough to capsize, and the things we don’t wear we will wrap up in our rubber blankets so that they won’t get wet.”

“Suppose we get down all right,” said Loren. “How are we going to get back?”

“We’ll shoulder our canoes and come up the portage road which has been cut through the woods around the rapids. For that reason we don’t want to take any thing with us that we can possibly dispense with.”

After listening to a few more hints like these, Tom and his cousins set out for the post-office; and having secured their mail they went home by the road that led around the foot of the lake, running at the top of their speed all the way through the woods to improve their wind. Their skiff, patent minnow buckets and dip nets were at once brought into requisition, and by the time the supper bell rang, they had caught bait enough to last them through a long day’s successful angling.

Promptly at four o'clock the next morning Tom Bigden opened the front door of the boat-house, and waved his hat in response to a similar signal of greeting which came to him from over the lake. Joe Wayring and his friends were just putting their canoes into the water.

"Splendid day," said the former, when the two little fleets came together near the middle of the lake. "There's going to be just wind enough to ripple the water, but not enough to raise a sea, and I wouldn't take a dollar for my chance of catching the finest string of bass that has been seen in Mount Airy this year."

"So say we all of us," exclaimed Sheldon; and this suggested the song which every school-boy knows, but to Tom Bigden's ill-concealed disgust, it was sung to the words: "Joe Wayring is a jolly good fellow," and that was a sentiment in which Tom did not fully concur. It put him in bad humor for the whole of the day, or, rather, until circumstances threw in his way an opportunity to make that jolly good fellow as miserable as he was himself. After that he felt better.

Under the steady motion of the sinewy arms

which swung the long double paddles, the light canoes made quick work with the three miles that lay between the boat-houses and the lower end of the lake, and presently Arthur Hastings turned toward the nearest shore, looking over his shoulder as he did so to call out to the canoeists behind him :

“Let’s make believe this is a hurry-skurry race, and that there is a prize in the pond waiting for the man who reaches the bottom of the rapids first.”

The challenge was promptly accepted. In a twinkling the little crafts were going toward the beach with greatly increased speed, and in a remarkably short space of time six young athletes, clad only in flesh-colored tights, were prancing around their canoes, busily engaged in wrapping their clothing in their water-proof blankets, and lashing their rods and minnow buckets fast so that they would not be thrown out into the water by a heavy lurch, or even by a capsize. Tom Bigden was the first to shove his canoe away from the shore, but there he had to stop. He was not acquainted with the channel, and needed a guide to show him

the way through ; but he won the second place, and was prompt to fall into it when Arthur Hastings caught up his paddle and pulled away from the beach.

Tom and his cousins had often viewed the rapids from the bank while trying in vain to screw up courage enough to attempt their passage, and if they looked dangerous to them then, they looked ten times more frightful when they surveyed them from their canoes on this particular morning. The sight of them was enough to make any body's nerves quiver. They looked as steep as the roof of a house, and the bottom of the gorge through which they ran, seemed to be literally covered with boulders. Tom could not see a single place which looked wide enough to admit of the passage of a canoe.

“What do you think of them?” asked Arthur, as he and Tom backed water with their paddles to keep their canoes from taking the plunge before they were ready.

“Who was the first man who went down here?” said Tom, in reply.

“One of the hotel guides.”

“Was he a graduate of a lunatic asylum, or did he go there afterward?” inquired Tom.

Arthur laughed until the woods echoed.

“Neither,” he answered, as soon as he could speak. “He’s got a level head on his shoulders yet, if one may judge by the constant demands that are made upon his time. Some of the people who come here every summer like him so well that they begin to make bargains with him before the ice is out of the lake. They wouldn’t do that if they had any reason to believe he was crazy, would they? Well, what do you say?”

“I say, go ahead whenever you get ready,” was the response.

“All right,” said Arthur, who saw by the expression on Tom’s face that he had no intention of backing out. “Now, watch every move I make, and let me get at least twenty or thirty feet ahead of you before you start. Look out for both ends of your boat. You won’t run on to an isolated rock unless you try, because the water runs away from it. That has a tendency to throw the bow from the obstruction, and the stern toward it; so the minute the bow is out

of harm's way, drop your paddle into the water on the side opposite the rock, and use it the best you know how."

"Why, that will throw me square upon the rock," cried Tom.

"No, it won't," insisted Arthur. "It will throw you away from danger, and the current rushing around the rock will carry you still further away. But if you use the paddle on the other side, you will come up against the rock ker-chunk ; and then you will have to swim the rest of the way down, because the stern of your canoe will, most likely, be smashed in. Understand?"

Tom replied that he did ; whereupon Arthur settled his cap more firmly on his head, took his paddle in both hands and with one bold stroke sent his frail craft into the rapids. The moment the current caught him in its grasp, he began to shoot ahead like a boy coasting down hill. Tom shut his teeth hard and gripped his paddle until the muscles on his bare arms stood out like a gold-beater's ; and so intent was he upon watching every move his guide made, that he forgot to look out for himself, until he was

called to his senses by a warning shout from his friends behind.

“Look out, there,” yelled Joe and Roy, in concert. “You’ll be over the brink the first thing you know.”

Tom heard the warning, but it came too late. He dropped his paddle into the water and made desperate efforts to check his canoe, which had already gained rapid headway; but the swift current had taken firm hold of him, and finding that it was much stronger than he was, he resolved to go ahead and trust to luck to keep from running into Arthur Hastings, in case the latter met with an accident.

Tom afterward said that he did not remember much about that wild ride. He was lost in admiration of Arthur Hastings’s skill as a canoeist, and followed in his wake through all the turns he made, which were so numerous and bewildering that Tom did not see how one boy’s head could contain them all. It was a lucky thing for him and his cousins that they did not attempt to go through there without a guide. He did not hear the waters foaming and roaring around him, nor did he see a single



SHOOTING THE RAPIDS.

one of the rocks past which he went with such speed that the wind whistled through his hair; but he did see the smooth surface of the pond the instant he came within sight of it, and when he shot into it, propelled by the momentum he had acquired during his descent of the rapids, he called out gleefully that he had not touched a solitary obstruction on the way.

"Of course not," answered Arthur. "If you had, you would not be as dry as you are now. There is a clearly defined channel all the way through the gorge, and you won't touch any thing if you keep in it. What would happen to you if you should get out of it, I don't know; but I think you would be fortunate if you came off with a simple capsize."

It was a thrilling sight that was presented to their gaze as they sat there in their canoes at the bottom of the rapids and watched the others as they came down. First Joe Wayring dashed into view around the bend, closely followed by Ralph Farnsworth, who seemed to be quite as much at his ease as his guide was, and handled his paddle and managed his canoe

quite as skillfully. By the time they reached the smooth water at the foot Roy and Loren came in sight, and in five minutes more the little fleet was reunited. The hearts of three of the canoeists beat a trifle faster than usual, but they had accomplished the run in perfect safety, and without a wetting, and they were ready to try it again at the very first opportunity.

“Take time to learn the channel before attempting any thing reckless,” cautioned Joe.

“After that you can come down by yourselves as often as you feel equal to the task of carrying your boats back over the portage.”

The boys went ashore long enough to put on their clothes, untie their rods, and put fresh water on their minnows, and then they were ready for the bass.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SQUATTER TURNS UP AGAIN.

ONE fishing excursion is much like another, and any boy who has handled a nicely-balanced bait-rod when the black bass, perch, and yellow pike were hungry and full of fight, as they were on the morning of which we write, will have a clearer idea of the sport Tom Bigden and the rest enjoyed there on the pond than we could possibly give him. We did not follow them through the rapids to tell how they played their fish and how many they caught, and so we shall have but little to say about it. Joe Wayring affirmed that the twenty minutes' fight he had with a nine pound pike, which began in less than half a second after he dropped his hook into the water, gave him solid comfort and enjoyment for a week afterward ; but whether or not he found any

comfort in something that happened when they went ashore to eat their lunch, is another matter altogether.

About eight o'clock the fish gave notice that they had quit business for the day by refusing to notice any of the lures that were dropped among them, and then the boys discovered that their long pull before breakfast had made them hungry.

"Did you ever eat a fish that had been baked in the ashes?" inquired Joe, addressing himself to Tom and his cousins. "Then you have yet one enjoyment in store for you. You won't think much of house-cooking after you have eaten one of Roy's dinners. We know a nice place on the point above, with an ice-cold spring handy, and we'll—"

"Excuse me for interrupting," said Loren, suddenly. "But did you ever see a dog like that before?"

The speaker was not a little surprised by the effect his words produced upon some of his companions. They all looked in the direction indicated by his finger, and then Joe began pulling up his anchor with almost frantic haste,

while Arthur and Roy reached rather hurriedly for their guns.

"You can't do any thing with him from here," said Joe.

"And if we paddle for the shore he will see us and take to his heels," added Roy.

"Why who—what are you going to do to him?" stammered Ralph.

"We'd be glad to shoot him if we could," replied Joe. "He's no dog. He's a half-grown bear."

Tom and his cousins, of course, asked a good many questions with their lips and more with their eyes, but Joe and his two friends were too busy to answer them. They made all haste to raise their anchors, and then pulled rapidly but silently toward the shore, all the while keeping a close watch over the movements of the bear, which was wandering listlessly about, now and then stopping to look into the water or to sniff at a log, as if he were hunting for something he had lost. Tom and his cousins thought he looked too small for a bear, but as he did not walk or act like a dog or any other animal they had ever seen at large, they were

forced to conclude that he really was a bear, and that he was in search of his breakfast. They didn't know whether to be afraid of him or not ; but when they saw how anxious Joe and his two friends were to bring themselves within shooting distance of him, they lost no time in pulling up their own anchors and falling in behind them. The bear, however, was not to be taken unawares. He did not appear to notice their approach, but he had his eyes on them nevertheless, and when he thought they had come close enough, he left the beach and lumbered off into the bushes.

"There !" said Tom, who was glad to see the last of him. "He has taken himself safely off."

"We expected it," said Roy, redoubling his exertions at the paddle. "If we only had Mars with us we could see more fun with him in half an hour than we could in a week's fishing. He begged hard to be allowed to come, but Joe made him stay behind. You see, he won't sit anywhere but in the bow, and he is so heavy that he makes a canoe hard to manage in rough water."

"He wouldn't trail the bear, would he ?"

“Of course he would, and be glad of the chance. If he found him, he would set up such a yelping that you would think there were a dozen dogs in the woods.”

“What are you going to do now?” inquired Ralph, as the six canoes ran their bows upon the beach, one after the other.

“We are going to stretch our legs, and that will be a comfort after sitting in such cramped positions for four long hours,” replied Joe, at the same time catching up his double-barrel and springing ashore with it. “We’ll follow up his trail, which we can easily do for a mile or more, because all the ground about here is swampy, and when we lose it, we’ll knock over a few squirrels and go up to the point and eat our breakfast. Keep close to us, or else stay within sight of the beach. The woods are thick, and you could get lost without half trying.”

Led by Arthur Hastings, the boys ran up the shore of the pond until they reached the place where the bear had turned off into the bushes, and then the pursuit began in earnest. Whether or not Loren and Ralph were as anxious to get a shot at the game as they pre-

tended to be, it is hard to tell ; but they made a great show of eagerness and enthusiasm, and Tom, not wishing to be out-done, floundered along the trail behind them. But he did not keep his companions in sight for more than five minutes—in fact, he didn't mean to. He gradually fell to the rear, and when the bushes closed up behind Roy Sheldon, who was the last boy on the trail, Tom sat down on a log and thought about it.

“That bear doesn't belong to me, and I don't know that it is any concern of mine whether they find him or not,” said he to himself. “It is easier to sit here in the shade, even if one does have to fight mosquitoes, than it is to go prancing about through a swamp where the water, in some places, is up to the tops of a fellow's boots.”

Tom suddenly brought his soliloquy to a close and jumped to his feet. There was a frightened expression on his face, but the determined manner in which he gripped his gun showed that he had no intention of running away until he had had at least one shot at the bear ; for that it *was* the bear which occasioned

the slight rustling in the thicket a short distance away, Tom had not the slightest doubt. Probably the animal had made a short circuit through the woods, and was now coming back to the pond to finish his breakfast. While these thoughts were passing through Tom's mind, the bushes toward which he was gazing parted right and left, and a big red nose, with a shock of uncombed hair above and a mass of tangled brown whiskers below it, was cautiously thrust into view, being followed a moment later by the burly form of Matt Coyle, the squatter. He was as ragged and dirty as ever, and carried a heavy rifle on his shoulder.

The meeting, which was entirely unexpected, was a surprise to both of them. To tell the truth, Tom was more alarmed when the squatter emerged from the thicket than he would have been if the bear had made his appearance. Matt Coyle was very angry at the Mount Airy people on account of the indignities they had put upon him, and who could tell but that Tom Bigden himself was included in the list of those against whom he had threatened vengeance? The squatter seemed to read the thoughts that

were passing in the boy's mind, for as soon as he could speak he hastened to say :

“You needn't be no ways skeary about meetin' us. We ain't forgot that you was the only one who said a kind word to us while we was down there”—here Matt gave his head a backward jerk intending, no doubt, to indicate the village of Mount Airy—“an' of course we ain't got nothing agin you.”

Tom drew a long breath of relief as he listened to these words. Matt wouldn't do any thing to him, and neither would he injure any of his property.

“But as fur the rest of 'em, they had better watch out,” continued the man, in savage tones. “I shan't forget 'em, an' I'll even up with them some day. It may be five year, an' it may be ten ; but I'll even up with 'em.”

“What are you and your boys doing now ?” inquired Tom. He did not like the way the squatter glared around him when he spoke of the village people, and he wanted to turn the conversation into another channel if he could.

“We ain't doin' nothin’,” was the surly reply, “'cause why, we ain't got nothin' to do



TOM UNEXPECTEDLY MEETS NATT COYLE.

with. We ain't got a bite of meat in the house, an' I was after that there b'ar when you fellers come up an' skeared him away. So thinks I to myself, I'll jest go down to the pond where their boats is, an' I'll take the best one of 'em an' cl'ar out afore they gets back. Then I'd have somethin' to do with."

"Where would you go?"

"Up to Injun Lake. I'm the bulliest kind of a guide fur that neck of the woods, an' so's my two boys; but you see we ain't got no boats, an' we're too poor to buy 'em."

"Why don't you go to the hotels and hire out to them?" demanded Tom; and then he wondered if there were a landlord in the world who would trust a boat-load of passengers, ladies and children for instance, to the care of the walking whisky barrel he saw before him.

"Didn't I try that very thing down there"—another backward jerk of the head—"an' didn't they tell me that they didn't have no use fur sich lookin' fellers as me an' my boys was?" exclaimed Matt Coyle, fiercely. "They did fur a fact. But if I had a boat of my own I could go up to Injun Lake where they ain't so

particular about the clothes a man wears, 'so long as he understands his business, an' I'd make piles of money, too; 'cause why—I'd work fur less'n the reg'lar hotel guides. See?''

"Yes, I see; but how long would it be before the regular guides would run you out, the same as the Mount Airy people did? They would make the country so hot for you that you couldn't stay there."

"Suppos 'n they tried that little game on?" answered Matt, laying down his rifle long enough to shake both his huge fists in the air. "Ain't that somethin' that two can play at? I'd break up the business of guidin' in less'n two seasons."

"How would you do it?"

"Yes, I would," Matt went on. "If I only had a boat that was easy to slip around in an' light to tote over the carries, I'd make the folks who come there fur fun so sick of them woods that they wouldn't never come there no more; then what would become of them two big hotels when there wasn't no custom to run 'em?"

"How would you go about it?" repeated Tom.

"Oh, there's plenty of ways," answered the squatter, shaking his head knowingly.

"Give us one of them."

"Wal, s'pos'n I should see a big party, with childern among 'em, start out from one of them hotels as big as life, an' I should foller along after 'em, easy like, an' some day, when there wasn't no men folks about, I should slip up, grab one of them childern an' run him off to the mountains? An' s'pos'n one of my boys should happen to be loafin' around that hotel when the party come back without the child, an' should hear that a reward of a hunderd, mebbe two hunderd dollars had been offered fur his safe return? Couldn't my boy easy hunt me up, an' couldn't I tote that young un back to his pap an' claim them dollars? Eh?"

Tom was so astounded that he could say nothing in reply. Matt Coyle was a great deal worse than he thought he was. The squatter saw that his solitary auditor was interested, and went on to tell of another way in which he could break up the business of guiding in the

wilderness about Indian Lake, in case the people living there didn't treat him and his family as well as Matt thought they ought to be treated.

"Or s'pos'n there wasn't no childern into the party," said he. "There'd be fine guns an' fish poles an' lots of nice grub, in course; an' couldn't I slip up to their camp when there wasn't no body there to watch it, an' tote some of them guns an' things off into the bresh an' hide 'em? Oh, there's plenty of ways to bust up guidin' an' them big hotels along with it. They would think twice before bein' too rough on me, 'cause they know me up there to Injun Lake."

And the man might have added that that was the very reason they drove him away from there—because they knew him.

"But the trouble is, I ain't got no boat of my own to run about with. The punt, she's too heavy, an' I ain't got no other," continued Matt Coyle; and then he stopped and looked hard at Tom, and Tom, in return, looked hard at Matt. An idea came into his head; or, to speak more in accordance with the facts, Tom

suddenly recalled some words which the squatter had let fall at the beginning of their interview.

“You said you were on your way to the pond to pick out a boat when you met me,” said Tom. “Well, why don’t you go ahead and get it? There is one among them that will just suit your purpose. It is a canvas canoe. It is very light, and you can pack it across a four mile portage without any trouble at all. If you don’t want to do that, you can take it to pieces and carry it in your hand as you would a grip-sack. It will hold up eight hundred pounds, and you can’t over-turn it by rocking it from side to side.”

“Who belongs to it?” inquired Matt, who had never heard of such a craft before.

“Joe Wayring ; and his father is one of the Mount Airy trustees. Your house was on his land, and if Mr. Wayring had said the word, you might have been living happily there now, with plenty to do in the way of boating and guiding and with money in your pocket,” said Tom, hoping that this reference to Mr. Wayring and the influence he might have exerted in

Matt's behalf, if he had seen fit to do so, would make the squatter angry, and awaken in him a desire to be revenged on the son since he could not harm the father in any way. The plan succeeded admirably. Matt laid his rifle on the ground so that he could shake both his fists, and the oaths and threats he uttered when he had thus relieved himself of all incumbrance, were frightful to hear. He did not yell, as he would like to have done, for he knew that the boys who had gone in pursuit of the bear were not far away; but he hissed out the words between his clenched teeth, and kicked and trampled down the bushes in his rage.

"I'd take the boat now, even if I knowed it wouldn't be of no use to me," said he, as soon as he could speak. "It'll cost ole man Wayring five an' mebbe twenty dollars to buy him another—"

"More than that," said Tom. "A good deal more."

"Wal, it'll be jest that much out of his pocket whatever it is," answered Matt Coyle.

"Where did you say them boats was?"

"Right down there on the beach," replied

Tom, indicating the direction with his finger. "You know which one I mean, don't you? You're sure you can tell a canvas canoe from a Shadow or a Rob`Roy?"

"Am I sure that I can tell a pipe from a shot gun?" retorted Matt.

"Yes, I suppose you can do that, but I am not so positive that you can tell one canoe from another," answered Tom. "Of course it wouldn't be safe for me to go down to the beach with you, for if Joe should happen to be anywhere within sight, I'd be in a pretty fix. You may be sure I shall not so much as hint that I saw you here in the woods, and you mustn't lisp it to a living person."

"Course not," said Matt. "Mum's the word between gentlemen."

Tom could scarcely restrain an exclamation of disgust. It looked as though this blear-eyed ragamuffin considered himself quite as good as the boy he was talking to.

"Take the canoe just as it stands," continued Tom, "and you will find a good lunch as well as a fine fishing-rod in it. Be lively now, for Joe may come back at any moment. I'll

keep out of sight, for of course I don't want to know any thing about it."

"I don't care fur them new-fangled poles what's got a silver windlass onto the ends of 'em, an' I wouldn't tech it if I didn't think I could sell it to somebody ; but I'll go fur the grub, I tell you."

So saying Matt Coyle went through with some contortions with the left side of his face which were, no doubt, intended for a friendly farewell wink, and stole off toward the beach ; while Tom turned and walked away in the opposite direction. When he thought he had put a safe distance between himself and the pond, he sat down to await developments. Nor was he obliged to wait long. A rifle cracked away off to the left of his place of concealment, then a shot gun roared, and presently voices came to him from the depths of the forest. Joe and his companions had given up the chase, and were now on their way back to the pond, shooting squirrels as they came. Tom knew when they passed by within less than a hundred yards of him, and he knew, too, that they were surprised because they did not meet him in the

woods or find him on the beach, for they set up a series of dismal whoops as soon as they reached the water's edge.

"Now for it," thought Tom, drawing his hand over his face and looking as innocent as though he had never been guilty of a mean act in his life. "I've got to meet them some time, and it might as well be now as an hour later. Whoop-pee!" he yelled in answer to the shouts that were sent up from the shore of the pond.

Tom's ears also told him when Joe Wayring first discovered that his canvas canoe was missing. The yells suddenly ceased, and Tom heard no more from Joe and his companions until he came out of the woods and halted on the beach a short distance from the place where they were standing. They were gathered in a group around Roy Sheldon, who was bent over with his hands on his knees, and his eyes fastened upon a foot-print in the mud. They were listening so eagerly to something Roy was saying, that Tom walked up within reach of them before any of the group knew that he was about.

“What have you found that is so very interesting?” inquired Tom, who knew that he ought to open the conversation in some way.

“Oh, here you are,” exclaimed Hastings. “We could not imagine what had become of you. Until we heard you call out there in the woods, we supposed that the bear had come back, and that you had gone after him in Joe’s boat.”

“Not by a long shot!” cried Tom, who saw very plainly what Arthur was driving at. “I haven’t seen the bear since I lost sight of you, and if I had, I should have gone away from him and not toward him. I have no ambition to shine as a bear hunter, and consequently I am here safe and sound.”

“But Joe’s canoe isn’t,” said Roy.

Tom looked, and sure enough the place where Joe had left his boat when he went into the woods was vacant. With much apparent anxiety and uneasiness he turned toward his canoe as if to satisfy himself that his own treasures were safe, when Roy broke out with—

“Oh, you’re a sufferer the same as the rest

of us. Your lunch and your fine bait-rod have gone off to keep Joe's canoe company. He took all our rods and his pick of the fish, too, and it is a great wonder to me that he was good enough to leave us our paddles."

Tom was really surprised now, and he was deeply in earnest when he said :

"If I ever meet the man who did that I'll have him arrested if I can find any one to make out a warrant for him." Then suddenly recollecting that he was not supposed to know who the thief was, he added : "Do you suspect any body ?"

"No, we don't suspect ; we know," answered Joe. "Look at that !"

"Can you tell a man's name by looking at the print of his foot in the mud ?" asked Tom.

"I can tell that man's name, for I know how he was shod the last time I saw him," replied Joe. "It was Matt Coyle. He made a good many threats before he left the village, and he has begun to carry them out already. He has put up his shanty somewhere in the vicinity of this pond, and will make it his business to

do some damage to every hunting and fishing party that comes here."

"Well, what are we standing here for?" exclaimed Tom, who had expected before this time to hear somebody propose an immediate pursuit of the robber.

"We might as well stay here and take it easy, as to get wild and rush around through the woods for nothing," replied Joe; and Tom was surprised to see how ready he was to give his boat up for lost. "In the first place, we couldn't overtake the robber, and in the second, we couldn't recover our property if we did. The day of reckoning will surely come, but we can't do any thing to hasten it."

The idea that the squatter would disturb any of the things in the other canoes had never entered into Tom's mind. Matt seemed to remember, with as much gratitude as such a man was capable of, that Tom was one of the few who sympathized with him when he was ordered out of Mount Airy, and yet he had made little distinction between his property and that belonging to the sons of the trustees who ordered him away. There was no sham

about his rage. He was angry because his elegant rod and German silver bass reel had disappeared, and because he knew that he would never dare have Matt Coyle arrested for the theft. If the latter should go before a magistrate and repeat the words that had passed between Tom and himself not more than half an hour ago, wouldn't he be in a pretty scrape ? He was in one already, for the squatter had a hold upon him, and subsequent events proved that Matt knew how to use it to his own advantage.

CHAPTER X.

FOREST COOKERY.

“**H**OW in the world did you manage to get separated from us so quickly?” asked Roy, addressing himself to Tom Bigden. “The last time I saw you, you were bringing up the rear all right, but when we lost the trail and stopped to hold a consultation, you were not to be seen.”

Tom had been expecting this, and he was ready with his answer. Pointing to his boots, which he had purposely stuck into a mud-hole, shortly after his companions left him, he said :

“I got mired in the swamp, and by the time I could crawl out and pour the water from my boots, you had left me so far behind that I could neither see nor hear any thing of you. If I had come directly back to the pond instead of wasting time in looking for you, I might

have been able to stop Matt Coyle's raid on our canoes."

"I doubt it very much," replied Joe Waring. "No doubt Matt has been watching us all the morning and waiting for us to come ashore so that he could steal something, and I believe he would have made his 'raid' if we had all been here to oppose him. As it was, he had full swing, and there are none of us hurt."

"That's my idea," said Arthur. "Judging by his countenance Matt is a bad man and a desperate one. Well, we have lost our rods and reels, which must be worth considerably more than a hundred dollars, but we have learned one thing, that we ought to profit by, and another that we can use to our advantage. To begin with, so long as Matt Coyle is allowed to stay about in this neck of the woods—"

"And I guess he'll stay here as long as he has a mind to," observed Roy.

"Well, I guess he won't," retorted Arthur.

"I know what you mean," said Roy. "You mean that the arm of the law is strong enough to snatch him out of the swamp. I don't dispute it. The trouble is going to be to get hold

of him. If he finds the low lands getting too warm for him, he will take to the mountains; and you know that there are a good many places among them where a white man has never yet set his foot."

"He'll come out, all the same," answered Arthur; "but as long as he stays around, Sherwin's Pond is no place for hunting and fishing parties, unless they bring some one with them to watch the camp while they are rambling about in the woods. We must warn the hotel people as soon as we get back to town."

"You said there was something we could use to our advantage," suggested Joe.

"Yes. We can see any amount of sport here this fall with the grouse. We flushed a lot of them while we were gone," he added, turning to Tom, "but of course we didn't shoot at them."

"Why not?" inquired the latter.

"Why, because the close season isn't over yet, and the birds are protected by law."

Tom and his cousins had nothing to say, but they wondered if Arthur Hastings always

obeyed the game laws when he was alone in the woods. They had not much respect for him if he did. They could not lay claim to any great skill themselves. An October grouse on the wing would have been as safe from harm a dozen yards away from the muzzles of their double-barrels, as though he had been on the other side of the globe. They always killed their game sitting ; and they would shoot at a robin as soon as they would shoot at a wild turkey.

“We didn’t come down here to go home hungry,” said Joe, pointing to a bunch of squirrels that lay at the foot of the nearest tree. “We’ll have two courses to our dinner or breakfast, or whatever you call a meal eaten at this time of day, and there’s plenty of water in the spring to wash it down with.”

The boys were all hungry, and there was nothing appetizing in looking forward to a breakfast of meat and fish. Joe Wayring and his friends did not mind it, for they had eaten many such meals during their vacation wanderings in the woods ; but Tom Bigden was not much accustomed to roughing it, and he con-

demned the squatter almost as bitterly for walking off with the hard-boiled eggs, sardines, canned fruit and bottle of cold coffee, which he had provided as his share of the common dinner, as he did for stealing his fishing-rod.

“When Matt opens my bundle and finds all that buttered tissue paper in it I guess he’ll wonder,” said Joe, as he stepped into Roy’s canoe and picked up one of the joints of the double paddle. “He won’t know what I intended to do with it; do you, Bigden?”

After a little reflection Tom concluded that he couldn’t tell what use the buttered tissue paper could be put to, unless Joe intended to start a fire with it, and the latter went on to explain.

“We always take a supply with us as a substitute for a frying-pan,” said he. “After cleaning the fish in good shape, we wrap him up in this tissue paper, and then add three or four thicknesses of wet brown paper. In the meantime, the fellow whose business it is to see to the fire has taken care to have a nice bed of coals ready. We rake these coals apart, put in the fish, and cover him up so quickly

that the paper around him has no time to get afire, and there he stays until he is done. Then we poke him out, and when the paper is taken off the skin and scales come with it; and if you relish a well-cooked fish, there he is."

"But how do you know when the fish is done?" asked Ralph.

"A potato is as good a clock as you want to go by," answered Joe.

"A potato?" repeated Ralph.

"Yes. I brought several with me, intending to put them on the table after they had done duty as clocks, but they have gone off with the sugar, lemons and other good things I had in my bundle. As soon as your fish is covered up in the coals," continued Joe, "put your potatoes in alongside of him and cover them up also. You can test them with a sharp stick at any time, and when they are done, which will be at the end of half an hour, if your fire is just right, poke them out, break them open and place them on a flat stone which you have previously washed, to cool. Then poke out your fish, take off the wrappings and fall to work. But we shall have to use boards this

trip—there are plenty of them lying around loose on the point, unless Matt Coyle has carried them off to patch up his shanty—and make our noses do duty as clocks.’’

Tom did not understand this, either ; but believing that he had made a sufficient airing of his ignorance of woodcraft for one day, at least, he asked no more questions.

Half an hour’s steady paddling brought the boys to the point, on which they landed to prepare their meager breakfast. That it was a favorite resort for parties like their own was evident. Beds of ashes surrounding the mossy boulder from beneath which the spring bubbled up, marked the places where roaring camp-fires had once been built, and the empty fruit and meat cans that had been tossed into the bushes told what good dinners had been eaten there.

Joe Wayring at once set off to hunt up a couple of suitable boards, another started a fire, two more fell to work upon the fish and squirrels, and the rest found employment in gathering a supply of fuel, and providing birch-bark plates and platters. Although Tom and

his cousins did their full share of the work, they did not neglect to keep an eye on their more experienced companions ; and they were astonished to see how easily one can get on without a good many things which the majority of people seem to think necessary to their very existence. When the fish had been cleaned and washed in the pond, they were spread out flat and fastened with wooden pins to the boards, which were propped up in front of the fire ; while the squirrels were impaled upon forked sticks and held over the coals by Arthur Hastings and Roy, who turned first one side and then the other to the heat, until they were done to a delicious brown.

“ If Matt Coyle had only been good enough to leave us the bacon, which I was careful to have put up with my lunch, these squirrels would be much better than they are going to be,” said Arthur, addressing himself to Ralph, who manifested the greatest interest in this rude forest cookery. “ Their meat is rather dry, you know, and a strip of nice fat bacon pinned to each side of them would furnish the necessary grease—that isn’t a very elegant

word, I know, but it expresses my meaning all the same—and give them a flavor also. It would make the fish more palatable, too. My advice to you is, always take a chunk of bacon with you if you are going to cook your dinner in the woods.”

“What’s he doing?” inquired Ralph, nodding toward Joe Wayring, who stood around with his hands in his pockets, now and then elevating his chin and sniffing the air like a pointer that had struck a fresh scent.

Arthur laughed heartily.

“Joe’s timing the fish,” was his reply. “When they smell so good that he can’t wait any longer, he will know they are done; and then dinner will be ready. It’s rather a novel way, I confess, but Joe hits it every pop.”

This was the first time that Tom and his cousins had ever sat down to a meal that was composed of nothing but fish and meat, but it tasted much better than they thought it would. Perhaps the reason was because they were hungry. At any rate they disposed of all that was placed before them, and would have asked

for another piece of squirrel if there had been any more on the big slice of bark that did duty as a platter.

“This meal will give you an idea of what we could have done if that squatter had not stumbled on our canoes while we were after that bear,” said Roy, who stood holding the empty platter in one hand and his light bird gun in the other. As he spoke, he sent the platter flying over the pond, and broke it into inch pieces by the two charges of shot he put into it before it struck the water. “What’s the next thing on the programme?” he continued. “I don’t much like the idea of undertaking that long carry during the heat of the day, but I don’t see what else we can do unless we are willing to stay here and be idle for hours to come. We can’t fish any more, that’s certain. We haven’t brought our long bows with us, and who wants to shoot squirrels with a shot gun? Not I, for one.”

There was no debate upon the question Roy had raised. They had their choice between going home, and staying where they were until the sun sank out of sight behind the mount-

ains ; and they were not long in making up their minds what they would do. When Joe Wayring picked up his gun and stepped into Roy's canoe (it was a Rice Laker, and not being decked over, it could easily accommodate him and its owner), the others got into theirs, and the fleet started toward the upper end of the pond.

We have said that Mirror Lake and Sherwin's Pond were fifteen miles apart, and that there were about twelve miles of rapids in the stream by which they were connected. This, of course, would leave three miles of still water ; but the trouble was, it could not be made use of by any one going from the pond to the lake. At every one of the points at which the rapids ceased and the stretches of still water began, the banks were high and steep, and so densely covered with briers and bushes that the most active boy would have found it a difficult task to work his way to the water's edge, and an impossible one if he had a canoe on his back. This being the case our six friends had a long portage (they generally called it a "carry") to look forward to ; but three of

them, at least, went at it as they went at every thing else that was hard—with the determination to do it at once and have it over with. Arthur Hastings went first with his little Rob Roy on his back, Joe Wayring followed close behind him with all the guns and paddles he could carry (the rest of them were lashed fast in the cock-pits so that they would not fall out when the canoes were turned bottom up), and they led their companions nearly a third of the distance before they put down their loads and leaned up against a tree to rest.

“This is my last visit to Sherwin’s pond this season,” panted Arthur, as he drew his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the big drops of perspiration from his forehead. “It’s too much sugar for a cent—altogether too much.”

“Every time you come through here on a hot day you say the same thing,” observed Joe.

“I know it; but I am in dead earnest now. The game isn’t worth the candle.”

“What’s the matter? Are you sorry that you didn’t smash your canoe in the rapids?” asked Roy.

“Or didn’t you catch fish enough to suit you?” chimed in Ralph.

“Perhaps he is disgusted because he didn’t shoot that bear,” said Joe.

“It’s hard work,” repeated Arthur. “The fun of running the rapids, catching a nice string of bass and seeing a bear, does not repay one for the horrors of this fifteen mile carry. It is worse for me to-day than it ever was before, because we have been so very unlucky. We have used our rods for the last time, and Joe will never see his canvas canoe again.”

This was the way in which Arthur and his two friends referred to their losses whenever they referred to them at all. There was no unreasonable exhibition of rage, such as Tom Bigden would have been glad to indulge in, if he could have found the least excuse for so doing.

If Tom had possessed even the semblance of a heart, it would have smote him when he saw how patiently Joe and his chums bore up under their misfortunes. If Matt Coyle had turned the matter over in his mind for a whole month,

he could not have hit upon anything that was so well calculated to render these three boys miserable, as was the piece of villainy which he had that day carried out at the suggestion of Tom Bigden. Tom was glad of one thing: His companions did not ask him any questions, and consequently he was not obliged to tell them any lies.

The boys rested a good many times while they were on the carry, and when at last they launched their canoes on the broad bosom of the lake they were so weary and devoid of ambition, that it was a task for them to paddle down to the boat-houses ; but, like their arduous journey across the portage, it was accomplished at last by steady and persevering effort, and when they separated near the middle of the lake and pulled away toward their respective homes, they told one another that the next time they went down to the pond they would see to it that Matt Coyle had no chance to spoil their day's sport.

"There's something about that business that don't look just right to me," said Ralph Farnsworth, as soon as Joe and his friends were out

of hearing. "I don't mind my own loss, but I am really sorry for Joe Wayring."

"So am I," said Loren. "He prized that canoe very highly. I believe he would rather have lost his handsome breech-loader. I tell you we made a mistake in having any thing to do with George Prime. Wayring and his crowd are much the better lot of fellows."

These remarks settled one thing to Tom Bigden's satisfaction. Ever since his interview with the squatter he had been asking himself whether or not he ought to take his cousins into his confidence, and now he knew that he had better not. He was afraid, as well as ashamed, to show them how far his unreasonable enmity toward Joe Wayring had led him, and so he said nothing.

Great was the indignation among some of the Mount Airy people when it became known that Matt Coyle had turned up again when he was least expected, and that he had walked off with a hundred and fifty dollars worth of property that did not belong to him. But Mount Airy, as we have seen, was like other places in that it numbered among its inhabitants certain

evil-minded and envious persons, who were never so happy as when they were listening to the story of some one's bad luck. George Prime and the boys who made their headquarters in his father's store were delighted to hear that the squatter had begun operations against Joe and his chums, and hoped he would "keep it up" until he had stolen or destroyed every thing they possessed. They declared that they were sorry for Tom and his cousins, but when they came to say that much to them by word of mouth, as they did the next afternoon when Tom, Ralph and Loren dropped into the drug-store on their way to the post-office, they did it in such a way that Tom became disgusted, and left without buying the cigar he had intended to ask for.

"The more I see of those fellows, the less I like them," said Tom ; and then he was about to open his battery of abuse upon Prime and his friends, when he discovered several of the Toxophilites coming down the side-walk. "I'll tell you what's a fact, boys," Tom added in a lower tone. "It's a lucky thing for us that we didn't buy those cigars. Here comes Miss

Arden with a whole crowd of girls, and there isn't a street or alley that we could slink into if we had a weed in our hands."

The boys lifted their hats as the girls came up, and passed on rejoicing over their escape. If they had been caught in the act of smoking they might have said good-by to all their hopes of getting into the archery club. A little further on they stopped in front of the window of a jewelry store, where some of the prizes that were to be distributed at the canoe meet had been placed for exhibition. Their three companions of the previous day were there, and their attention was concentrated upon a beautiful blue silk flag, trimmed with gold fringe and bearing in its center the monogram of the Mount Airy canoe club, which occupied a conspicuous position among the prizes.

"That's some of Miss Arden's handiwork," said Joe Wayring, after he had cordially greeted Tom and his cousins. "It is to go to the first one who walks the greasy pole."

"Great Moses!" ejaculated Tom. "To what base uses—"

"That's just what I said," interrupted

Arthur Hastings. "I told her, too, that it wouldn't make half the fun the greasy pig did, and you ought to have seen her stick up her nose. Another thing, now that I think of it: Unless the wind is just right, the flag will wallop itself over and around the pole until it is all covered with grease."

"And the boy who is lucky enough to capture it will have to take it into the water with him, and there is her elegant prize ruined at the start," chimed in Joe Wayring.

"Don't you think Miss Arden had wit enough to provide for that?" exclaimed Mr. Yale, the jeweler, who happened to overhear this remark. "Do you see that little flag beside the blue one? Well, that is intended to represent the prize. If you are fortunate enough to capture that, you can fly the blue pennant at your masthead."

Miss Arden was right when she told her friends that she was sure that the gallant fellows who belonged to the canoe club would work harder for her flag than they would for a greasy pig. Every one of the boys who stopped in front of Mr. Yale's window that after-

noon to look at the prizes, told himself that if he did not win that flag it would be because some lucky member walked off with it before he had a chance to try for it.

During the next two weeks little or nothing happened in or about Mount Airy that is worthy of note. A deputy sheriff and constable went down to Sherwin's Pond to arrest Matt Coyle, and, after a three days' search returned empty-handed. They found the place where the squatter had built his shanty, but it was gone when they got there, and so were Matt and his family. The authorities at Indian Lake were requested to keep a look-out for him, but Matt was too old a criminal to be easily caught. He and his boys offered themselves as guides to the guests of the hotels, but when they were told that they were not wanted, they set themselves to work to carry out the programme of which Matt had spoken to Tom Bigden on the day he stole Joe Wayring's canoe—that is, to break up the business of guiding in the region about Indian Lake, and to make the people who came there for recreation so sick of the woods that they would never

come there again. Whether or not they succeeded in their object shall be told further on.

Tom Bigden and his cousins never knew how near they came to being black-balled when their names were brought before the canoe club at its next meeting. Prime and his friends were suspicious of Tom. The latter kept away from the drug-store altogether; he and his cousins were often seen in Joe Wayring's company, and Prime said that looked as though Tom wasn't in earnest when he promised to assist in carrying out the arrangements that had been made for defeating Joe and Arthur at the coming canoe meet.

"I'll vote for him," said Prime, after Noble, Scott, and one or two others had labored with him for a long time, "but if he plays us false, as I really think he means to do, he can just hang up his fiddle, so far as the Toxophilites are concerned. I'll take pains to let Miss Arden and the rest of the girls know that he and his cousins smoke and play billiards and cards on the sly, and they'll make dough of his cake in short order."

"The agony is over at last," said Tom, after Joe Wayring and his inseparable companions Arthur and Roy, who came over in the *Young Republic* the next morning to announce the result of the ballot, had gone home again. "Bear in mind, now, that we are to stick to our original programme and win if we can. If we find that we have no show, and that the prizes must go to Wayring and his friends, or to Prime and his followers, we'll stand by Wayring every time. We'll teach that drug-store crowd that the next time they make up a slate they had better put our names on it if they expect us to help them."

It never occurred to Tom and his cousins that possibly Joe Wayring, and all the other boys who believed that friendly trials of strength and skill, like those that were to come off during the canoe meet, should be fairly conducted, would not thank them for their interference. Joe had warned all his friends that there were boys in the club who had been "booked" to win by fair means or foul (of course he did not tell them where he got his information), and they made some pretty shrewd guesses as to

who those boys were. Being forewarned they were forearmed, and they did not want any help. Tom found it out on the day the races came off.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CANOE MEET.

THE first thing the members of the canoe club did when they sprang out of bed on the morning of the second day of August, was to run to the window, draw aside the curtain and take a look at the sky and the lake. The one was cloudless, and the surface of the other was rippled by a little breeze which promised, by the time the sun was an hour high, to freshen into a capital sailing wind. For all the members of the club were not so deeply interested in the paddle, portage and hurry-scurry races as Joe Wayring and Tom Bigden were. A few of them were expert sailors, and anxious to show the spectators (there would be more strangers among them this year than ever before), how skillfully they could manage their cranky little boats when they were under canvas.

The young athletes were all in excellent training, and there was not one among them who did not expect to win a prize of more or less value during the day. Some of the canoeists had discovered a couple of Yale college students among the guests at the Mount Airy House, and after a little urging they had consented to assume the management of affairs, one as judge and the other as referee. They knew all about the rules of boating, and Joe Wayring told himself, that Prime and his friends would have to be smarter than he thought they were if they could play any tricks under the watchful eyes of those two college men without being caught in the act.

At an early hour Mr. Wayring's spacious boat-house, which was to be used as head-quarters and had been handsomely decorated for the occasion, was thrown open, and shortly afterward the members of the club began to arrive. They drew their canoes upon the beach at the side of the boat-house and disappeared in the dressing-room, where they remained until the warning blast of a bugle notified them that it was time to begin operations. Now and then

one of them would take a cautious peep out at the back door and turn around to inform his companions that all New London had come up to attend the meet ; and although they knew that there were a good many people assembled to witness the sports, they were all surprised, and not a few of them were made nervous by the scene that was presented to their gaze when they sprang off the wharf, and ran to push their canoes into the water. Mr. Wayring's grounds were crowded with gayly dressed spectators, who were lounging on the grass or sitting comfortably under the tents that had been provided for them, and the lake was covered with sail and row boats, all of which were flying as many flags as they could find places for.

A mile up the lake the stake-boat was anchored. In it was one of the judges, who reclined at his ease on a couch of cushions with an awning over him to keep off the sun. The other judge was Mr. Hastings, who stood on the wharf to act as starter. The referee's barge, propelled by six of the best oarsmen that could be found among the guides, lay off the wharf,

and the police-boats had already cleared the course.

“All you young gentlemen who are to compete in this race draw a number as you pass, and station yourselves accordingly,” said Mr. Hastings, who held a small tin box above his head so that the contestants could not look into it and pick a number instead of taking it at random. “Go down as far as the leaning tree so as to get a good start, and fill away at the sound of the bugle, No. 1 taking the outside.”

The first event was a sailing race—two miles with a turn. Those who had entered for it drew a number from the box, lingered a moment to look at the swinging silver pitcher and gold-lined goblets, which, with a tray to hold them, were to go to the boy who sent his canoe first across the line on the home stretch, and then ran out to launch their canoes and hoist their sails. There were ten starters, and they made a pretty picture as they came up the lake before the fresh breeze that was then blowing, and dashed across the imaginary line that marked the beginning of the course. Another

blast from the bugle warned them that it was a "go," and the race was begun.

The sound of the bugle seemed to excite every body—the people on shore as well as the boys in the boats, who crowded their cranky little crafts until it looked as if some of them must certainly go over. There were several of Prime's friends among the contestants, and Joe and his two chums wondered if any one of them had been "booked" to come out ahead in this particular race. They saw nothing to indicate it. There was no attempt to foul the boy who seemed likely to win, and indeed there was no chance for any such proceeding. The referee's barge easily kept abreast of the racers, and the man in the stake-boat kept his glass directed toward them from the start. There was some crowding and confusion at the turn, and some of the little vessels came dangerously near to one another; but their crews made desperate efforts to clear themselves, some because they knew they were closely watched, and others because they were determined to win fairly or not at all, and the race was not interrupted.

It was a close and exciting struggle, and the boy who brought his Rice Laker first across the line was fairly entitled to the silver pitcher.

"That was a splendid race," exclaimed Joe Wayring, as the contestants, after beaching their canoes, came into the boat-house to listen to the congratulations, or to receive the sympathy of their friends. "The paddle race comes off now, and I hope that those of us who take part in it will make as good a showing as you did."

While Joe was talking in this way, Ned Stewart, one of the boys who had just been defeated, drew a few of his friends around him in a remote corner of the boat-house by intimating to them in a mysterious way that he had something of importance to say to them.

"Look here, Bigden," said Ned, in an excited whisper. "I believe it is understood that some of us are to foul Wayring or any fellow in his crowd who stands a chance of winning, and give Noble a chance to carry off the honors of the paddle race?"

"I believe you did make some such arrange-

ment as that," replied Tom, indifferently. "But if my memory serves me, you did not consult me in regard to it."

These words produced the utmost consternation among the boys in the corner.

"Are you going back from your word?" cried Noble, as soon as he could speak.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Tom.

"You know very well what he means," exclaimed Bob Lord, who, it will be remembered, had been "booked" to win the upset race. "Now, look here, Bigden: You have been running with Wayring a good deal, of late, and we might have expected this of you. You want Wayring to win because you think he can do more to get you into the archery club than we can; but I assure you that you are mistaken there. You can't get in without our votes, and if you go back on us we shan't give them to you."

"I don't want Wayring to win," said Tom, emphatically. "My Cousin Loren is going to come out at the top of the heap in this race."

"Well, I'll bet you a dollar he isn't,"

exclaimed Noble, whose flashing eyes showed how angry he was. "If I don't win this race nobody shall."

"Well, I'll bet you two dollars that I shall keep pretty close to Loren, and that the boy who interferes with him purposely will go out of his canoe in less time than he can say 'General Jackson' with his mouth open. Not only that, but I'll thrash him the very first time I can catch him ashore," replied Tom, returning Noble's angry scowl with interest, and doubling up his fists as if he were ready and willing to put his threat into execution then and there.

"Look here! Look here, boys," whispered Prime, who was really afraid the two would come to blows. "Such work as this will never do. If we quarrel among ourselves, Wayring and his crowd will walk off with all the prizes as they have always done."

"I have no intention of quarreling," said Noble, who did not like the way Tom glared at him. "I only want Bigden to keep his promise."

"What promise?" demanded Tom.

“Why, didn’t you say that you were down on Wayring and Hastings, and that you did not want to see them win any of the races?” inquired Scott.

“I did.”

“And didn’t you promise that you would help *us* win?” chimed in Frank Noble.

“No, I didn’t. When you told me what your programme was, I simply said: ‘All right.’ By that I meant that you could do as you pleased, and my cousins and I would do as *we* pleased. You were very good to yourselves when you picked out all the best races for your own men, and left us out in the cold, were you not? We do not consider that we are under obligations to abide by any such arrangement, and we shan’t do it. We’ve got a programme of our own that we mean to carry out if we can, and the fellow who interferes with us in any way may make up his mind to take the consequences.”

So saying Tom walked off followed by his cousins, leaving Prime and his companions lost in wonder.

“Serves us just right for having any thing

to do with such upstarts," said Noble, who was the first to speak. "They have gone back on us fair and square; that's easy enough to be seen."

"Who ever heard of such impudence?" exclaimed Prime. "They came to Mount Airy with the idea that they could run the town to suit themselves, and because they can't do it, they are mad about it. They must not be allowed to win a race. I would much rather see Wayring or Hastings come in first."

"That brings me to what I wanted to say to you," said Ned Stewart. "I don't know whether or not that college man in the stake-boat suspects any thing, but he certainly acted like it. He kept his eyes on us from the time we crossed the line until we got home. If you try to foul any body you must be very sly about it, or else you will be caught and ruled out."

If Stewart had any thing else to say he did not have time to say it, for just then the bugle sounded another warning, and that put a stop to the conversation. It was a call to the boys who were to take part in the paddle race. A

few seconds later thirteen active young fellows in showy uniforms sprang off the wharf one after the other, shoved their canoes into the water, and paddled away to take the positions assigned them by the numbers they had drawn from the tin box. As luck would have it, Tom Bigden found himself near the center of the line, with his Cousin Loren on one side of him and Frank Noble on the other. Joe Wayring was on the right, nearest the shore, and Arthur Hastings on the extreme left, near the middle of the lake.

“It’s a bad outlook for us,” whispered Loren, after he had run his eye up and down the line. “Joe and Arthur are so far away that you can’t touch them.”

“Never mind,” replied Tom, in the same cautious whisper. “They will have to come closer together when we get to the stake-boat, and then, perhaps, we can do something. Keep your weather eye peeled for Noble. He’ll spoil your chances if he can. He’s bound to win or kick up a row.”

“Are you all ready?” shouted Mr. Hastings, from his place on the wharf.

There was no response in words, but each boy grasped his double paddle with a firmer hold, dipped one blade of it into the water and leaned forward so that he could put all his strength into the first stroke, which was given before the notes of the bugle had fairly died away.

The thirteen contestants got off well together, and for a while it was any body's race; but by the time a quarter of a mile had been passed over, Arthur Hastings and Roy Sheldon, who "made the pace", began to draw to the front, while others fell behind, and when they rounded the stake-boat the line was very much broken. Tom Bigden did not try to win. According to the agreement this was not his race. He simply kept close beside his cousin—he had harder work to do it than he expected to have, for Loren sent his canoe through the water at an astonishing rate of speed—holding himself in readiness to frustrate any attempt at trickery on Frank Noble's part, or to foul Frank if he showed speed enough to beat Loren fairly.

How the struggle would have ended, had each

boy been as determined to win or lose on his merits as the majority of them were, it is hard to tell. Arthur and Roy paddled much faster now than they did on the day they had those friendly trials with Tom and his cousin, and so did Loren. Frank Noble, who was by no means an antagonist to be despised, kept close company with them, while Joe Wayring seemed content to linger behind and save his wind so that he could force the pace on the way home; consequently he was an eye-witness to a piece of deliberate rascality on the part of Tom Bigden, which was so neatly executed that it might have passed for an accident, if Joe, when questioned by the judge, had not told the truth concerning it. It came about in this way:

Arthur and Roy rounded the stake-boat together, keeping far enough away from each other to avoid all danger of a collision. Frank Noble followed in their wake, and close behind him came Loren Farnsworth, who having got his "second wind", was plying his paddle with so much strength and skill that he was rapidly closing up the gap between himself and his

leaders. Noble saw defeat staring him in the face, and believing that he could gain a few feet on Hastings and his companion, and throw Loren out of the race at the same time, he resorted to an expedient which drew a warning shout from Joe Wayring, who was contentedly following in Tom's rear.

"Look out there, Frank!" cried Joe. "You'll be foul of somebody in a minute more."

"I told Tom that Loren Farnsworth should never come out at the top of the heap in this race, and I meant every word of it," said Frank, to himself; and paying no attention to Joe's warning, he shot his canoe across Loren's bow, passing so close to him that the latter was obliged to stop paddling and back water in order to escape the collision which for a second or two seemed inevitable.

This was Tom Bigden's opportunity and he was prompt to improve it. With a movement so quick and dextrous that it looked like an accident to the people on shore who witnessed it, Tom unjointed his paddle, dropped one blade of it overboard, and laying out all his strength

on the other, he swung the bow of his canoe around and sent it crashing into the side of Noble's boat, overturning it in an instant and throwing its occupant out into the water. Then, quick as a flash, Tom backed his canoe out of Loren's way and sent it directly in the path of the other boys, who were thus given their choice between two courses of action: One was to make a wide detour in order to clear the three boats that lay in their way, and the other was to give up the race, which was now virtually left to Hastings, Sheldon and Loren Farnsworth. The most of them preferred to draw out of a contest in which they had no show of winning, and with many exclamations of anger and disgust turned about and paddled back to the starting point; while the others crowded up around the stake-boat to hear what the judge and referee would have to say about it.

"I claim foul on that!" shouted Tom; and the words and the speaker's easy assurance so astonished Joe Wayring, that he sat in his canoe with his paddle suspended in the air as if he did not know what to do with it.

"I claim foul!" sputtered Noble, as soon as his head appeared above the surface of the water. "Bigden capsized me on purpose."

"I say I didn't!" cried Tom, looking very surprised and innocent indeed. "What business had you to try to cross my bows, when any body with half an eye could see that you had no chance to do it? You declared that if you didn't win this race no one else should, and that's why you got in my way."

"And you said that your Cousin Loren was booked to win, if you could make him do it," retorted Noble, who had climbed into his canoe and was rapidly throwing out the water it had shipped in righting. "That's why you capsized me. It is a lucky thing for you that you didn't smash in the side of my boat as you tried to do. I would have made you pay roundly for it, if there is law enough in Mount Airy to—"

"That will do," said the judge, in a tone of authority. "This is not the place to settle quarrels, and neither am I the one to do it."

"My paddle got unjointed, and I couldn't

shift from one side to the other quick enough to keep clear of you," said Tom.

Meanwhile Hastings, Sheldon and Loren Farnsworth were making fast time down the home stretch toward the starting point. To the surprise of every body, and to the no small annoyance of Arthur Hastings, who had never before been so closely followed by any one except Sheldon and Wayring, Loren was not only holding his own, but he was gaining at every stroke. There is no telling which one of the three would have come out ahead at the finish, had they been permitted to continue the struggle; but the referee, seeing the commotion among the rest of the fleet, called out: "No race!" and pulled up to the stake-boat to see what was the matter. The judge gave him his version of the affair, Noble and Tom Bigden gave theirs, and each of the two boys would have expressed his opinion of the other in no very complimentary terms, had not the referee interrupted them by saying—

"Hard words can't settle disputes of this kind. The race will have to be tried over again, and Noble, I don't think you will be allowed

to take any part in it. You made a mistake in trying to cross Bigden's bows when you did, because you had no room to do it without interfering with him. You threw him out of the contest, and came very near throwing Farnsworth out, too; consequently it will be my duty to bar you. I am sorry—"

"You needn't be, for I am sure I don't care," replied Noble, rudely. He tried hard to control himself so that the boys around him should not see how very angry he was, but his efforts met with little success. To be ruled out of one contest was to be ruled out of all; and that was a severe blow to a boy who had confidently expected to carry off some of the best prizes. "What are you going to do with Bigden?" he asked, or rather demanded of the referee.

"That depends," answered the latter, somewhat sharply.

"He can't do any thing with me because I have violated no rule," said Tom, defiantly. "You ran across my path when you had no business to do it, and an accident to my paddle made me run into you. That's all there is of it."

But the referee and judge seemed to hold a different opinion. They conversed for a few minutes in tones so low that no one but the guides could hear what they said, and presently the judge appealed to Joe Wayring.

"You were close behind Bigden when this happened," said he. "Do you think it was an accident?"

"What does he know about it?" cried Tom, fiercely. "I don't care what he or any body else says; I know—"

"One moment, please," interrupted the referee. "You have had your say, and you don't help your side of the case any by showing so much excitement over it."

"Do you think Bigden unjointed his paddle purposely?" continued the judge, addressing himself to Joe.

"Yes, sir," answered the latter, promptly.

"Do you think he could have kept clear of Noble if he had made use of ordinary skill and caution?"

"I am sure of it."

"How could he have done it?"

"By working his paddle on the port side of

his canoe. That would have thrown him around the stake-boat very neatly and given him a winning place in the race; but instead of that he used his paddle on the starboard side, and of course that threw the bow of his canoe plump into Noble's side."

Frank and the judge nodded as if to say that that was about the way the thing stood, and after a few minutes' reflection the referee said—

"I am perfectly satisfied and will announce my decision where all the members of the club can hear it. As we are wasting time and delaying the other sports by staying here, we will go back to head-quarters."

It was not a very sociable company of boys who turned about at this command and paddled slowly back to the starting point, and neither were Noble and Tom Bigden the only ones among them who were mad enough to fight. Two of their number were so jealous of each other and so anxious to win prizes, that they had deliberately disgraced the club in the presence of hundreds of strangers; and it is hard to see how any lover of fair play could help being annoyed over it. Joe Wayring felt

it very keenly; and consequently when Tom Bigden paddled up alongside and told him that he intended to get even with him some way for the stand he had taken, Joe was in just the right humor to give him as good as he sent.

“Joe Wayring, you have made an enemy of me by this day’s work,” said Tom, in a threatening tone.

“By telling the truth in regard to your fouling of Frank Noble?” exclaimed Joe. “I don’t care if I have. I saw the whole proceeding, and I know that you meant to do it. I warned you that any boy who could so far forget himself as to deliberately interfere with another, would be forever ruled out of the club’s races, and you will find that I knew what I was talking about.”

“You might as well expel me and be done with it?” exclaimed Tom, angrily. “What’s the use of my belonging to the club if I am not allowed to take part in its contests? Joe Wayring, there’s no honor about you. You have led me to believe that you were my friend, and then you went back on me the very first chance you got.”

“Do you mean that I have been sailing under false colors?” cried Joe, indignantly. “If you throw out any more insinuations of that sort before we reach the boat-house I’ll dump you in the lake. When the judge questioned me I told him the truth; and I wouldn’t have done otherwise to please any body.”

Something must have warned Tom that Joe would be as good as his word, for he had nothing more to say to him. He gradually fell behind and allowed him to paddle down to the boat-house in peace.

CHAPTER XII.

OFF FOR INDIAN LAKE.

WHEN Joe Wayring beached his canoe below the boat-house, he was immediately surrounded by his friends who were impatient to hear all about it. They knew there had been a foul, for some of the laggards in the race had seen it ; but they could not tell how it had been brought about, or who was to blame for it.

“It was Noble’s fault in the first place, and Tom Bigden’s in the second,” said Joe, in response to their hurried inquiries. “It seems that there are three ‘cliques’ in the club, one of which believes in doing things fairly, while the other two do not. Loren Farnsworth was ‘booked’ by one of the cliques to win the paddle race, while Frank Noble was the choice of the other. Each was determined that his opponent should not win, and the result was most disgrace-

ful—a deliberate collision at the stake-boat in the presence of all these strangers. What sort of a story will they carry back to the city about the Mount Airy canoe club? Noble began the row by putting himself in Loren's way and Tom retaliated by capsizing Frank's canoe and throwing him out into the water."

"Do you think he meant to do it?" inquired Hastings, who was far in the lead at the time, and could not of course see what was going on behind him.

"I know he did," replied Joe, who then went on to give a circumstantial account of the manner in which the fouling was done. The boys all declared that it was a very neat trick, and one of them added—

"That Tom Bigden's cheek is something wonderful. As soon as he had backed out of Loren's way and laid himself across the course so that we couldn't get by him without losing more ground than we could possibly make up, he called out that he claimed foul on that. Did you ever hear of such impudence?"

"Please give me your attention for one moment, gentlemen," shouted the president

of the club ; and Joe and his friends turned about to see the referee perched upon a dry-goods box.

“ Young gentlemen,” said he, as the boys gathered around him, “ the contestants in the paddle race will go over the course again this afternoon, one hour after lunch. They will be the same as before, with the exception of Frank Noble and Thomas Bigden, whom I am compelled to bar out. It is exceedingly unpleasant to me to be obliged to render this decision, but the rules under which your sports are conducted leave me no alternative.”

“ What do you think of that, fellows ? ” said Arthur Hastings. “ If Bigden isn’t satisfied now that he can’t run this club to suit his own ideas, I shall always think he ought to be.”

“ Well, Noble,” said Prime. “ You’re done for at last. You are ruled out of every thing. What are you going to do ? ”

“ What are *you* going to do ? ” asked Frank in reply.

“ I ? Nothing at all. What can I do ? ”

“ You can go home with me, can’t you ? ”

“ Eh ? Well—yes ; I suppose I could, but I

don't want to. The fun is only just beginning."

"And are you going to stay here and enjoy yourself and assist in making the meet a success when one of your friends is barred out?" exclaimed Noble, indignantly. "I didn't think that of you, Prime. Why didn't you stay close to me so that you could put in a word to help me? You knew what I was going to do."

"I couldn't stay close to you. Those fellows in the lead made the pace so hot that I had to fall behind, and I didn't see the foul when it occurred."

"No matter for that. You could have said something in my defense if you had wanted to; but instead of standing by me, you left me to fight Joe Wayring and the judge alone. Look there! Bigden's cousins are not going back on him as you are going back on me. Tom is preparing to go home, and they are going with him."

But Noble did not know what a stormy time Tom had with Loren and Ralph before he could induce them to forego all the sports and pleasures of the meet. Loren was particularly obstinate. He was satisfied now that he was a pretty

good hand with a double paddle, and confident that if any of the three recognized champions beat him when the afternoon race came off, they would have to make their canoes get through the water faster than they ever did before. Then there was the upset race, which Ralph was almost sure he could win, and the greasy pole walk, with Miss Arden's silk flag to go to the best man—must they give up all these things just because Tom had been ruled out?

“What's the reason I am ruled out?” exclaimed Tom, who was as mad as a boy ever gets to be. “Isn't it because I tried my best to help Loren win the paddle race? I tell you that you don't stand the least show of winning any thing; but stay if you want to.”

Ralph and Loren were well enough acquainted with Tom to know that there was a volume of meaning in his last words. If they braved his anger they would be sure to suffer for it in the end, and if Tom turned against them, where could they look for friends and associates? Prime and his followers would not have any thing more to do with them; Joe Wayring, unless he was as blind as a bat, had seen quite

enough to make him suspicious of them ; and when they came to look at it, they found that they were in a very unenviable situation.

“ I’d give almost any thing if I could live the last half hour over again,” declared Loren, after he had taken a few minutes in which to consider the matter. “ We’ve made Noble and his crowd so mad that they’ll never look at us again, Tom is just as good as expelled from the club, and we may as well give up all hope of being admitted to the Toxophilites. We’re at outs with every body, and the only thing we can do is to stand by one another.”

Ralph thought so, too. Without wasting any more time in argument they put on their long coats to cover up the uniforms they would probably never wear again, shoved off their canoes, and set out for home ; and no one except Frank Noble saw them go. The other members of the club were too much interested in their own affairs to pay any attention to the movements of a boy who had gone deliberately to work to mar their day’s enjoyment.

“ Tom’s got two fellows to stand by him, but I am left alone,” thought Noble, with no little

bitterness in his heart. "Prime and the rest of them pretend to hate Wayring and his crowd, and yet they are willing to stay and help on the sports after I have been kicked out of the lists. For two cents I'd hunt up Wayring and tell him to look out for Scott and Lord."

But he didn't do it. He knew that such a proceeding would turn every body against him, and he had made enemies enough already. Without attracting attention he got into his canoe and paddled down to his boat-house.

The unfortunate ending of the paddle race had a most depressing effect upon the members of the canoe club, some of whom declared that their organization was on the eve of falling to pieces. After that every thing "dragged". The whole programme was duly carried out, but the contestants did not enter into the sports with their usual spirit and energy. Scott and Lord, who were "booked" for the sailing and upset races, respectively, won nothing at all. They could not win fairly, and the promptness with which Tom and Frank had been ruled out deterred them from attempting any tricks.

Arthur Hastings won the paddle race after a hard struggle ; Joe Wayring, being the first to walk the greasy pole, carried off Miss Arden's silk flag ; and Roy for once went home as empty handed as he came, the sailing and upset races being won by other boys. But Roy wasn't mad about it, as some of the unsuccessful ones were. He had come there for a "good time", and he had it ; and his failure to win a prize did not spoil his day's sport.

After the spectators had gone back to their hotels and all the members of the club had set out for home, the three chums sat down in the boat-house to compare notes.

"I am glad it's over," said Roy, giving expression to the thoughts that were passing through the minds of his companions. "It was the meanest meet I ever heard of. I wouldn't have had that affair at the stake-boat happen for any thing. Those visitors from New London will say that we are as bad as the professional oarsmen who saw their boats, and capsize themselves on purpose."

"Well, you expected something of the kind, didn't you ?" said Joe. "I did. When Big-

den told me that there were certain boys in the club who had been 'booked' to win certain races, I was sure that Prime had a finger in the pie, and that the reason Tom told me about it was because he had got mad at him or some member of his party. The events of the day have proved that I was right. In making up the slate, Prime and his friends either forgot or refused to give any of the races to Tom and his cousins, and that was what caused the trouble."

"Well, it's some satisfaction to know that they will never have a chance to cause us any more trouble," said Arthur. "They will withdraw from the club, of course."

"I think there's no doubt about that," said Joe. "I know that that is what I should do if I were in their place. As Tom Bigden said: 'What's the use of belonging to a club if you are not allowed to take part in the contests?' I am of the opinion that they will band together and get up a club of their own. Now let's talk about something else. To-morrow we start for Indian Lake."

This was a much more agreeable topic of

conversation than the canoe meet, and they talked about it until the lengthening shadows admonished Arthur and Roy that it was time for them to set out for their homes.

Indian Lake was a favorite place of resort for the Mount Airy sportsmen, and for these three boys in particular. They went there regularly every summer. The country about the village was not wild enough to suit them, and besides the trout streams were so constantly fished by the New London anglers, that they were beginning to show signs of giving out. Joe and his friends were so well acquainted with the lake that they never thought of taking a guide when they went there for recreation. They went everywhere that a guide could take them, and with no fear of being lost. They were joint partners in a skiff, which they had fitted up with special reference to these annual trips—a strong, easy running craft, so light that it could be carried over the portages without any great outlay of strength, and so roomy that the boys could sleep in it without being crowded. It was provided with lockers fore and aft, in which the owners carried their extra

clothing, provisions and camp equipage, an awning to keep off the sun and a water-proof tent which would keep them dry, no matter how hard the rain came down. With this boat a journey of a hundred miles—that was the distance between Mount Airy and Indian Lake, and there was a navigable water-course almost all the way—was looked upon as a pleasure trip. The boys would have been astonished if they had known what was to be the result of this particular visit to the lake.

That night there were three busy young fellows in Mount Airy, who were packing up and getting ready for an early start on the following morning. If you could have seen their things after they got them together, you might have been surprised to see that there was not a single fowling-piece among them. What was the use of taking guns into the woods during the "close" season—that is, while the game was protected by law? But each boy took with him a weapon which, in his hands, was almost as deadly as a shot gun is in the hands of an ordinary marksman—a long bow with its accompanying quiver full of arrows.

The law permitted them to shoot loons—if they could. At any rate it was sport to try, and to see the lightning-like movements of the bird as it went under water at the twang of the bow-string.

“There’s one thing about your outfit that doesn’t look just right,” said Uncle Joe, pointing to the heavy bait-rod which his nephew placed in the corner beside his long bow. “The idea of catching trout with a thing like that, and worms for bait! Before you go into the woods again I will see that you have a nice light fly-rod.”

“But I can’t throw a fly,” said Joe.

“Well, you can learn, can’t you?”

Joe said he thought he could, and there the matter rested for a whole year.

The next morning at four o’clock Joe Waring was sitting on the wharf in front of the boat-house, watching Arthur Hastings, who was coming up the lake in the skiff. When he arrived Joe passed down to him two cases, one containing his long bow and quiver, the other his bait-rod and dip-net, a bundle of blankets, a soldier’s knapsack with a change of clothing

in it, and the contents of a big market basket. The basket itself was left on the wharf, because it would have taken up too much valuable space in the lockers. Mars, the Newfoundlander, begged to go, too, and growled spitefully at Arthur's little cocker spaniel, which growled defiantly back at him from his safe perch on the stern locker. Jim (that was the spaniel's name), always went on these expeditions as body-guard and sentinel. He seemed to have a deep sense of the responsibility that rested upon him, and the arrogant and overbearing manner in which he conducted himself toward strangers, proved that he considered himself to be of some consequence in the world. He was a featherweight and took up but little room ; while the Newfoundlander's huge bulk would have been sadly in their way. They might as well have added another boy to the party.

Having stowed his supplies and equipments away in the lockers, Joe picked up an oar and assisted Arthur to pull the skiff up to Mr. Sheldon's boat-house, where they found Roy waiting for them. He soon transferred himself and his belongings from the wharf to the cock-

pit, and then the skiff went at a rapid rate across the lake toward the river, the boys chanting a boat song as they steadily plied the oars. They paused a moment at the head of the rapids, and as they gazed at them, Arthur said—

“How do you suppose Matt Coyle ever succeeded in getting that big heavy punt of his down there? I wouldn’t make the passage in her for all the money there is in Mount Airy.”

“It’s a wonder to me that he didn’t smash her all to pieces,” said Joe. “She’s in Sherwin’s Pond now, I suppose, and there she will have to stay, for there is no way to get her out. I wonder what Matt has done with my canoe?”

“Oh, he has snagged and sunk her before this time,” replied Roy, consolingly. “I wonder what he has done with the rod he stole from me?”

“Some black bass has smashed it for him most likely,” said Arthur. “At any rate you will never handle it again.”

The boys had from the first given up all hope of ever recovering their lost property. The deputy sheriff and constable, stimulated to extra exer-

tion by the offer of a large reward by the Mount Airy authorities, had scoured the woods in every direction in search of the thief, but their efforts had met with no success. They found the site of Matt's shanty, as we have said, but the shanty itself had disappeared. So had Matt and his family, and the officers could not get upon their trail. Perhaps if we go back to the day on which Matt stole Joe Wayring's canoe and follow his fortunes for a short time, we shall see what the reason was.

When the squatter picked up Joe's double paddle and shoved away from the shore, after taking possession of all the fishing rods and bundles that he could lay his hand on, he told himself that he had done something toward paying off the Mount Airy people for the shameful manner in which they had treated him and his family.

"They wouldn't let us stay up there to the village an' earn an honest livin', like we wanted to do," said Matt, with a chuckle, "an' now I'll show 'em how much they made by it. Them things must be wuth a power of money," he went on, looking down at the elegant rods

which he had unjointed and laid on the bottom of the canoe, "an' I reckon mebbe we've got grub enough to last us fur a day or two—good grub, too, sich as don't often come into our house less'n we hooks it. This is a powerful nice little boat, this canoe is, an' now we'll go up to Injun Lake, an' me an' the boys will set up fur independent guides. If they won't have us there, we'll bust up the business."

While communing thus with himself the squatter did not neglect to ply his paddle vigorously, nor to look over his shoulder now and then to satisfy himself that his rascality had not yet been discovered. But Joe and his companions spent fully half an hour in roaming about through the woods, looking for the bear and shooting squirrels for their dinner, and when they came out, Matt was nowhere in sight. He had crossed the pond, and was urging the canoe up a narrow winding creek toward his habitation. With a caution which had become a part of his nature, he had concealed his place of abode so effectually that a fleet of canoeists might have passed up the creek without knowing that there was a shanty within

less than a stone's throw of them. The only visible sign that any body had ever been in the creek was a disreputable looking punt, with a stove and battered bow, which was drawn out upon the bank. She had had a hard time of it in getting through the rapids, and it was a mystery how Matt had saved himself from a capsize, and kept his miserable old craft afloat until he could get her up the creek. She had carried the squatter and all his worldly possessions for many a long mile on Indian Lake and its tributary streams, but her days of usefulness were over now. Her trip down the rapids was the last she ever made. She was in Sherwin's Pond and there she must stay.

"Hi, there!" yelled Matt, as he ran the bow of the canvas canoe upon the bank.

An answering yelp came from the bushes, and presently Matt's wife and boys came hurrying out. They would not have expressed the least surprise if the squatter had come back with as many turkeys or chickens as he could conveniently carry, because they were accustomed to such things; but to see him in possession of a nice little canoe, five silver mounted fishing

rods and as many big bundles, excited their astonishment.

“Where did you get ’em, old man, an’ what’s into them there bundles?” was the woman’s whispered inquiry.

“I got ’em up there in the pond clost to the foot of the rapids,” answered Matt, gleefully. “I’ll learn them rich fellers up to Mount Airy to treat a gentleman right the next time they see one. We’re jest as good as they be if we are poor.”

“Course we be,” said Jake, Matt’s oldest boy. “What’s them there things—fish poles? I want one of ’em.”

“All right. You an’ Sam take your pick, an’ we’ll sell the rest. If you see a feller that is needin’ a pole, you can tell him that you know where he can get one worth the money.”

“About how much?” queried Jake.

“Wal,” said Matt, reflectively, “them poles must have cost nigh onto five dollars; but seein’ that they’re second hand we will have to take a leetle less fur ’em—say two an’ a half.”

“An’ how much be them there things with the cranks onto ’em wuth?” asked Sam.

“’Bout the same. You tell the feller, when you find him, that he can have a pole an’ a windlass fur five dollars.”

This showed how much the squatter knew about some things. There wasn’t a rod in the lot that cost less than twenty dollars, or a reel that was worth less than thirteen. Matt would have thought himself rich if he had known the real value of the property he had in his possession.

“What’s into them there bundles?” demanded the old woman.

“Grub,” answered Matt. “Good grub, too.”

In less time than it takes to tell it, the bundles had been jerked out of the canoe and torn open. Matt’s family was always hungry, and his wife and boys fairly gloated over the hard boiled eggs, bacon, sardines, sandwiches and other nice things which the boys’ thoughtful mothers had put up for their dinner.

“Rich folks has nice grub to eat, don’t they?” said Jake, speaking as plainly as a mouthful of bread and meat would permit.

“Yes; an’ we’ll soon be in a fix to have nice things, too,” said Matt, confidently. “I’ve got a boat of my own now, an’ I’m goin’ to Injun Lake an’ set myself up fur a guide.”

“But, pap, they drove us away from there once,” exclaimed Jake. “They was jest like the Mount Airy folks—they didn’t want us around.”

“Don’t I know it?” cried Matt, laying down his sandwich long enough to shake both his fists in the air. “But they won’t drive us away again, I bet you, ’cause it’ll be wuss for ’em if they try it. I’ll kick up sich a rumpus in them woods that every body will steer cl’ar of ’em; then what’ll become of them big hotels when they ain’t got no custom to support ’em? I reckon we’d best be gettin’ away from here this very night. I’m in a hurry to get to guidin’so’t I can make some money before the season’s over, an’ besides I kinder want to get outen the way of that there constable. He’ll be along directly, lookin’ fur these things, an’ I don’t care to see him.”

“What’ll we do with the house?” asked the

old woman. "We can't tote it cl'ar to the lake on our backs."

"Course not. We'll burn it an' the punt, too. They won't never be of no more use, 'cause 'taint no ways likely that we shall ever come here agin', an' we ain't goin' to leave 'em fur them Mount Airy fellers to use when they come to the pond huntin' an' fishin'."

The squatter need not have borrowed trouble on this score. There was not a hunter or a fisherman in the village who could have been induced to occupy his shanty or use his punt, for, like their owners, they were things to be avoided. But Matt and his family seemed to think that they would be accommodating somebody if they left them there, and the order to destroy them by fire was carried out as soon as they had eaten the last of the stolen provisions.

While his wife was engaged in removing the bedding and cooking utensils, and tying them in small bundles so that they could be easily carried, and the boys were at work hauling the punt out of the water and turning it up against the house so that the two would burn together, Matt busied himself in putting the

rods into their cases ; after which he walked around the canvas canoe and gave it a good looking over. Tom Bigden had told him that if he didn't want to carry the canoe on his back, he could take it to pieces and carry it in his hand as he would a gripsack ; but the trouble was, Matt did not know how to go to work to take it apart. Every thing fitted snugly, and he could not find any place to begin. The only parts of it that he could move were the bottom boards ; and when he had taken them out, the frame-work of the canoe was as solid as ever. He spent a quarter of a hour in unavailing efforts to start something, and then giving it up as a task beyond his powers, he decided that the only thing he could do was to carry it as he would carry any other canoe. A less experienced man would have shrunk from the undertaking. It was fully twenty miles to the river which connected the two lakes, and the course lay through a dense forest where there was not even the semblance of a path. But there was no other way to get the canoe to Indian Lake.

Meanwhile, Matt's wife and boys had worked

to such good purpose that every thing was ready for the start. Each one had a bundle to carry, and the boys had set fire to a quantity of light wood which they had piled in the middle of the shanty. They lingered long enough to see the fire fairly started, and then turned their faces hopefully toward Indian Lake, the old woman leading the way, and Matt bringing up the rear with the canvas canoe on his back.

CHAPTER XIII.

SNAGGED AND SUNK.

HAVING plenty of time at their disposal, Joe Wayring and his friends were in no particular hurry to reach Indian Lake. After they entered the river they kept the skiff moving rapidly, but at the same time they did not neglect to keep their eyes open for "rovers"—that is, any objects, animate or inanimate, that would give them an opportunity to try their skill with their long bows. If a thieving crow, a murderous blue jay, or a piratical kingfisher showed himself within range, the sharp hiss of an arrow admonished him that there were enemies close at hand. Kingfishers were objects of especial dislike. The boys were fish culturists in a small way, and had stocked a pond on Mr. Sheldon's grounds. On the very day that the "fry" were put into it, the king-

fishers and minks made their appearance, and then began a contest which had been kept up ever since. By the aid of traps and breech-loaders the boys waged an incessant warfare upon the interlopers, and finally succeeded in thinning them out so that the trout were allowed to rest in comparative peace.

The boys did not stop at noon, but ate their lunch as they floated along with the current. The monotony of the afternoon's run was broken by an hour's chase after an eagle, which they did not succeed in shooting, although one of Roy's arrows ruffled the feathers on his back, and by a long search for an otter which swam across the river in advance of them. About four o'clock in the afternoon they reached a favorite camping, or rather, anchoring ground, a deep pool noted for its fine yellow perch, and there they decided to stop for the night. The anchor was dropped overboard just above the pool, and when the skiff swung to the current, the bait-rods they had purchased to replace those that Matt Coyle had stolen from them, were taken out of the lockers, floats were rigged, a box of worms which they had

been thoughtful enough to bring with them was opened, and the sport commenced.

The fish in that pool were always hungry, and the floats disappeared as fast as they were dropped into the water. A few "fingerlings" were put back to be caught again after they had had time to grow larger, but the most of those they captured were fine fellows, and heavy enough to make a stubborn resistance. In less than half an hour they had taken all they wanted for supper, and then the anchor was pulled up and the skiff drawn alongside the bank. Roy and Joe went ashore to clean the fish, and Arthur staid in the boat to put up the tent. This done, he brought out a pocket cooking stove which he placed on the forward locker, and by the time the fish were ready, he had an omelet browning in the frying pan. That, together with an ample supply of fried perch, bread and butter and a cup of weak tea, made up a supper to which they did full justice.

There were still a few hours of daylight left, and as soon as the dishes had been washed and packed away in the locker, the boys took their

bows and went ashore to stretch their legs and shoot at "rovers". Arthur succeeded in bringing down a kingfisher after half an hour's hard stalking, and his companions shot a squirrel apiece for breakfast. Just at dusk they met at the boat, which was hauled out into the stream and anchored. The jack-lamp was lighted and hung upon one of the poles that supported the tent, the rubber mattress was inflated, and the three friends lounged around and talked until they began to grow sleepy. Then the blankets and pillows were brought to light, one side of the tent was buttoned down to the gunwale, the other being left up to admit the air, and the boys laid down to sleep, trusting to Jim to give them notice of the approach of danger. He gave them notice before three hours had passed away.

About midnight the spaniel, which for half an hour or more had been very restless, suddenly jumped to his feet and set up a frightful yelping. If some one had been pounding him he could not have been in greater distress. The boys started up in alarm to find the sky overcast with black clouds, the wind coming

down the river in strong and fitful gusts and the anchor dragging. There was a storm coming up, it promised to be a severe one, too, but it did not find the young voyagers unprepared to meet it. The forward end of the tent was promptly rolled up, a spare anchor dropped into the water, and the skiff was again brought to a stand-still. By that time the rain was falling in sheets, but the boys paid no sort of attention to it. They buttoned the tent down all around and went to sleep again, fully satisfied with the precautions they had taken. Jim was satisfied too, although he thought it necessary to slumber lightly. Whenever a strong gust of wind came roaring down the river, he would turn his head on one side and look critically at the anchor ropes, which led through ring-bolts in the bow, and were made fast to cleats on the forward locker; and having made sure that the ground tackle was doing its full duty, he would go to sleep again.

The night passed without further incident, the morning dawned clear and bright, and after a breakfast of fried perch and broiled squirrel, the boys resumed their journey toward

Indian Lake. On the evening of the fifth day after leaving Mount Airy, they found themselves within a short distance of their destination ; but instead of going on to the lake they turned into a creek which connected the river with a lonely pond that lay deep in the forest. They did not intend to go to Indian Lake until they stood in need of supplies. There were big hotels and a crowd of guests there, and they saw enough of them at home. To quote from Joe Wayring, their object was to get away from every body and be lazy.

The sun went down long before they turned into the creek, and night was coming on ; but they pushed ahead in order to reach a favorite anchorage in the mouth of a little brook, whose waters could be relied on to furnish them with a breakfast of trout. They laid out all their strength on the oars and the skiff flew swiftly and noiselessly up the stream, its movements being governed by Arthur Hastings, who looked over his shoulder now and then to take his bearings. After they had been speeding along for half an hour, he began keeping a sharp lookout for the brook ; and once when

he turned around he thought he saw a moving object in the creek a short distance away. He looked again, and a thrill of exultation and excitement ran all through him.

"Joe," said he, in a scarcely audible whisper, "there's your canvas canoe, as sure as I'm a foot high."

"Where?" exclaimed Joe and Roy, turning quickly about on their seats.

In reply Arthur pointed silently up the creek. His companions looked, and then they too became excited. There was a canoe in advance of them sure enough, and dark as it was, they instantly recognized it as the one Matt Coyle had stolen from Joe Waring.

There was somebody in it, and he was plying his double paddle as if he were in a great hurry. He did not appear to know that there was any one besides himself in the creek, for he never once looked behind him.

"It isn't big enough for Matt, and so it must be one of his boys," whispered Roy.

"Boy or man, he shall not go much further with that canoe," said Joe in a resolute tone.

“That’s my boat and I’m going to have it, if you fellows will stand by me.”

“Now Joe!” exclaimed Roy, reproachfully.

“I didn’t mean that. Of course I know that you can be depended on,” said Joe, hastily. “Let’s take after him. If we find that we can’t take the canoe away from him, we’ll sink her. Matt Coyle shan’t have her any longer.”

The three oars fell into the water simultaneously, and the skiff shot silently up the creek in pursuit of the canoe, whose occupant was making his double paddle whirl through the air like the shafts of a windmill. An oar rattled behind him and aroused him from his reverie. He faced about to see the skiff close upon him. The night had grown so dark that he could not tell who the crew were, but he knew that they would not come at him in that fashion unless they had some object in view. Matt and his boys always had the fear of the law before their eyes, and Jake, believing that a constable or deputy sheriff was in pursuit of him, turned about and churned the water into foam in his desperate attempt to outrun the skiff. He succeeded in

getting a good deal of speed out of his clumsy craft, but fast as he went the pursuers gained at every stroke.

“Hold on with that boat!” shouted Arthur. “We’ve got you and you might as well give in.”

But Jake wasn’t that sort. He redoubled his exertions with the paddle, but all of a sudden his progress was stopped so quickly that Jake left his seat and pitched headlong into the bow of the canoe. Speaking in western parlance he had “picked up a snag” whose sharp, gnarled end penetrated the canvas covering of the canoe, tearing a hole in it that was as big as Jake’s head. It did not hang there but floated off with the current, and began filling rapidly. In a few seconds she was out of sight, and Jake was making all haste to reach the shore. A moment later the skiff dashed up, and Roy Sheldon struck a vicious blow at the swimmer with his oar; but he was just out of reach. A few long strokes brought him to shallow water, two jumps took him to dry land, and in an instant more he was out of sight in the bushes.

“What tumbled him out so suddenly?” exclaimed Joe.

“Look out, boys! There’s a snag right under us,” said Roy.

“Where in the world is the boat?” inquired Arthur.

“There she is,” answered Joe, pointing to a swirl in the water which marked the spot where the canvas canoe was quietly settling down on the bottom of the creek.

“Sunk!” cried Roy. “So she is. She must have a cargo of some sort aboard, or she would not have gone down like that. Now, what’s to be done?”

“We can’t do any thing to-night,” replied Joe. “I propose that we anchor here and wait until morning comes to show us how she lies. If the water isn’t over thirty feet deep we can raise her.”

The others agreeing to this proposition, the ground tackle was got overboard, and Roy, who handled the rope, encouraged Joe by assuring him that the water was not an inch over twelve feet deep.

“If that is the case,” said the latter, hope-

fully, "I shall soon have my boat back again. It will be no trouble at all to take a line down twelve feet. I'd give something to know what she is loaded with."

"Contraband goods, I'll be bound," said Arthur. "The fruits of a raid on somebody's smoke-house or hen-roost. I am sorry to know that Matt Coyle is in the neighborhood, for we don't know at what moment he may jump down on us and steal something."

"We mustn't let him catch us off our guard," said Roy. "It won't be safe to leave the skiff alone for a minute."

The boys' hands were as busy as their tongues, and in a short time the tent was up, a light from the jack-lamp was streaming out over the water, and the appetizing odor of fried bacon filled the air. The knowledge that the thieving squatter was no great distance away, and that he might make his appearance at any moment, did not cause them to eat lighter suppers than usual, nor did it interfere with their customary sound and refreshing sleep. They felt safe from attack. They did not believe that Matt Coyle had a boat (they knew very

well that he could not have brought the punt with him), and consequently there was no way for him to reach them unless he resorted to swimming ; and they did not think he would be foolish enough to try that.

The boys slept soundly that night, but the next morning's sun found them astir. Arthur made a cup of coffee over the pocket cooking stove, after which the tent was taken down, and Joe Wayring made ready for business by divesting himself of his clothing.

The first thing was to find out just where the canoe lay, and that did not take them as long as they thought it would. The water was as clear as crystal, and every thing on the bottom could be plainly seen by Joe and Roy, who leaned as far as they could over opposite sides of the skiff, while Arthur rowed them back and forth in the vicinity of the snag.

"There she is!" cried Roy, suddenly ; and as he spoke he caught up the anchor and dropped it overboard. "We're right over her, and there isn't a snag or any other obstruction in the way."

Joe Wayring stepped upon the forward

locker, holding in his hand one end of a rope which he had coiled down on the bottom of the skiff so that it would run out easily, and as soon as the boat stopped swinging he dived out of sight. When the commotion in the water occasioned by his descent had ceased, his companions could observe every move he made as he scrambled about over the sunken canoe, and presently they saw him coming up.

“Haul away,” said Joe, as he shook the water from his face and climbed back into the skiff.

“What’s it fast to?” asked Roy.

“A bag of potatoes.”

“What did I tell you?” exclaimed Arthur Hastings. “I knew that fellow had been on a plundering expedition.”

“But you thought he had been robbing somebody’s hen-roost or smoke-house,” Roy reminded him.

“And so he has,” said Joe. “There’s a whole side of bacon down there.”

The boys pulled gently on the line, and presently the bag of potatoes came to the surface. It was seized and hauled into the skiff,

the line was unfastened and passed over to Joe, who was about to go down again, when his movements were arrested by the snapping of twigs and the sound of voices which came from the depths of the woods. They were angry voices, too, and rendered somewhat indistinct by distance and intervening bushes, but the boys recognized them at once.

“There comes Matt Coyle, his wife and both their boys,” said Joe. “Now we shall hear something.”

“I wonder what they think they are going to do,” said Roy. “Just listen to the noise they make in crashing through the brush. One would think there were a lot of wild cattle in there.”

Joe Wayring did not await their appearance, but went down to reeve the line through a ring-bolt in the stern-post of the sunken canoe, and to bring up her painter and the side of bacon. When he arose to the surface Matt Coyle and his family were striding up and down the bank, shaking their fists and swearing lustily.

“That there is my hog-meat, too,” roared

the squatter, as Joe tossed the bacon into the skiff. "I want it an' I'm goin' to have it, I tell you."

"We don't know that these provisions rightfully belong to you," said Roy. "We have an idea that you stole them last night or, rather,—"

"No, I didn't steel 'em nuther," shouted Matt.

"Or, rather, that one of your boys did," continued Roy, while Joe hung on to the side of the skiff and looked over it at the angry party on the shore. "I am sure we don't want them."

"Then bring 'em ashore like we told you," screamed the old woman. "You're thieves yourselves if you keep 'em."

"Do you see any thing green about us?" demanded Arthur. "I'll tell you what we will do : If you will stay there on the bank in plain sight until we get our boat raised, we will go up the creek and leave the potatoes and bacon opposite the mouth of the trout brook, so that you can get them after we have gone away. What are you going to do with those sticks?"

he added, addressing himself to the two boys who just then came out of the bushes with a heavy club in each hand.

“ We’re goin’ to knock you out o’ that boat if you don’t fetch that there grub of our’n ashore without no more foolin’,” answered Jake, in threatening tones. “ It’s our’n an’ we’re goin’ to have it back.”

“ That’s the idee, Jakey,” exclaimed the old woman, approvingly. “ Knock the young ’ristocrats out o’ their boat. I reckon that’ll bring ’em to time.”

“ If you try that, I’ll lay some of you out flatter than so many pancakes,” returned Roy, defiantly ; and as he spoke he tore open the bag containing the potatoes. Catching up one in each hand, his example being promptly followed by Arthur Hastings, he arose to his feet just in time to dodge one of Jake’s clubs, which came whirling through the air straight for his head. Before the missile had struck the water on the other side of the skiff, Roy launched one of his potatoes at the aggressor. Like most left-handed fellows Roy could throw like lightning ; and the potato, flying true to

its aim and with terrific force, struck Jake fairly in the pit of the stomach, and doubled him up like a jack-knife.

“That’s the idee, Jakey,” yelled Joe Wayring, who was delighted with the accuracy of his chum’s shot. “Knock them young ’ristocrats out o’ their boat. I reckon that’ll bring ’em to time. Throw another, Jakey.”

But Jake was in no condition to throw another. It was a long time before he could get his breath; and when he did get it, the howls with which he awoke the echoes of the surrounding woods were wonderful to hear. The squatter’s family, believing that Jake had been mortally wounded, gathered about him with expressions of sympathy, and Joe Wayring took advantage of the confusion to climb into the skiff and put on his clothes. If there was going to be a fight he wanted to take a hand in it.

“Whoop!” shrieked the old woman, rolling up her sleeves and shaking a pair of huge, tan-colored fists at the object of her wrath. “If I was a man I’d swim off to that there boat an’ maul the last one of you. Matt, why don’t

you do it ? Seems like you was afeard of them fellers."

"Yes, Matt, why don't you do it?" said Arthur, encouragingly.

"Yes, Matt, show a little pluck," chimed in Roy. "Come on. Swim off to us ; and if I don't sink you before you have got ten feet from the shore, I'm a Dutchman."

"I don't think we have any thing more to fear from them," said Joe, in a low tone. "It's a lucky thing for us that Roy thought of using those potatoes. If we had nothing to defend ourselves with they could drive us away from here very easily. Now let's raise the canoe, and go up to the brook and catch our breakfast. I'm getting hungry."

It was scarcely two minutes' work to bring the wreck to the surface. It readily yielded to the strain that Joe and Arthur brought to bear upon the lines, and as soon as they could get hold of it, they drew it into the skiff stern foremost, thus compelling the water with which it was filled to run out at the hole in the bow. After that it was turned bottom upward over the stern locker and lashed fast. Of course

Matt Coyle and his family had not been silent all this while. They had kept up a constant storm of threats and abuse, and the squatter fairly danced with rage when he saw the boat, with which he had expected to accomplish so much in the way of "independent guidin'" was lost to him forever. But they did not attempt any more violence, for Roy stood guard over his companions with a potato in each hand, and ready to open fire on them at any moment.

"Now, then!" exclaimed Joe, as he pulled up the anchor while the other boys shipped their oars, "do you want these provisions, or don't you?"

"Course I want 'em," growled Matt, in reply. "They're mine, an' we ain't got no grub to eat."

"All right. I don't suppose that you have the shadow of a right to them, but we will give them up to you if you will do as we say."

"Wal, I won't do as you say, nuther," declared Matt. "I ain't goin' to let myself be bossed around by no 'ristocrats, I bet you."

"Then you shan't have the potatoes," said Joe, decidedly. "Give way, boys."

the lockers, impatiently waiting to be called to breakfast, and the club, after glancing from the side of the boat, struck him in the ribs and tumbled him off into the creek.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HISTORIAN CONCLUDES HIS NARRATIVE.

“**W**HOOP-EE!” yelled Matt Coyle, dancing about on the bank in high glee. “That was a good shot. Lookout! Here comes another that’s goin’ to send some of you to keep company with the purp. I reckon we’ve got you whar we want you this time, cause the taters is all on our side the creek.”

As the squatter spoke a second club left his hand, being thrown with so much force and accuracy that if the boys had not been on the alert, some and perhaps all of them would have been knocked overboard, for the missile was almost as long as the cock-pit, and as it came through the air with a rotary motion, it covered space enough to hit all their heads at once. This was the signal for a perfect shower of clubs. Every one of the family had two or more, which were thrown as rapidly as they

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could be changed from one hand to the other, and Joe and his chums were kept so busy dodging them, that they could not find opportunity to return the fire. But when the squatter and his allies had thrown all their clubs without effect, and thus disarmed themselves, the boys sprang to their feet and opened their battery. The first potato Roy threw took Jake square in the mouth, bringing forth another series of doleful yells from that unlucky young ruffian, and the second put the old woman's right arm in a sling for a week. At the same moment Arthur wiped out the insult that had been put upon Jim by taking Matt a whack under the eye that raised a lump as large as a hen's egg.

"Whoop-ee!" shouted Joe Wayring, as a potato from his own hand struck Sam's tattered cap from his head. "That was a bully shot. Look out! Here comes another. We ain't got no taters on this side of the creek, I reckon."

The fusilade that followed was a hot one, and the squatter and his family, finding that they could not stand against it, beat a hasty retreat

into the bushes. Then Arthur turned to assist Jim, who had been making desperate but unavailing efforts to climb into the skiff. He wasn't hurt at all, but he was very mad.

The plucky boys were not called upon to defend themselves. Matt Coyle made an attempt to secure the provisions, but went back with an aching head and a bloody nose, and the three chums saw no more of him that summer. But they heard him. From his place of concealment in the bushes the squatter and his wife abused them roundly, and shouted at them threats that were enough to frighten almost any body.

The boys caught a fine string of trout, cooked and ate breakfast in peace, and then kept on up the creek toward the pond. As soon as they were out of range, Matt and his family came from their hiding-places after the potatoes and bacon; but they made no demonstration beyond showing the boys their fists and swearing at them.

After that things went smoothly with Joe and his companions. They thoroughly enjoyed their outing, and when it was ended they went

home with a new lease of life, and with brains invigorated to such degrees that they were ready to grapple with any thing that might come before them during the school term, which was to begin on the following Monday.

During the year affairs in Mount Airy moved along in much the same way that they do in every little village which can boast of a popular high school and rival organizations of almost every kind. After the canoe meet, the line was sharply drawn between the two opposing factions. They did not come to open warfare, but they were intensely hostile, and a very little thing would have precipitated a fight between Joe Wayring and his friends on one side, and Noble, Scott, Prime and Tom Bigden and his cousins on the other; for the latter did not long remain at swords' points with the boys who made their head-quarters at the drug-store. They had a stormy time when they first came together, and Tom announced his readiness to thrash all the boys who had interfered with Loren during the paddle race, provided they would come one at a time; but Prime and a few others exerted themselves to bring

order out of the confusion, and through their efforts Tom was elected president of the new canoe club which was organized at once. But that did not satisfy him. If he could have had his own way in the matter, he would have preferred to be a respected member of the other club without any office at all. Besides, Prime and his friends could not forget that Tom, a new-comer, had deliberately "booked" himself and his cousins for all the best races, in utter disregard of the rights of those who ought to have been allowed to win. They never quite forgave him for that, and there was not that harmony in the new club that there ought to have been in order to insure its prosperity. Tom was also elected short-stop in Prime's ball-club, and in the first match game that was played, had the gratification of putting out Joe Wayring and Arthur Hastings every time they went to the bat. That did Tom more good than any thing he had accomplished since he came to Mount Airy, although he did feel rather mean when Joe and Arthur complimented him on his swift and accurate throwing.

At the next meeting of the Toxophilites many vacancies were made by the resignation of boys who knew that they stood a fine chance of being expelled for what they had done at the canoe meet, and by the voluntary withdrawal of a number of others, who preferred Prime's company and Noble's to the companionship of fellows who were willing to be ruled by a lot of girls.

In the new club, of which Loren Farnsworth was chosen secretary, there were no restrictions laid upon cribbage, cigars and billiards, and so very good-natured was the master bowman, that he did not even object to pipes when his men were drilling in the ranks. But he insisted on prompt and regular attendance at all the meetings, because he wanted his company to march in the procession on the next 4th of July.

"Say, captain," exclaimed Tom Bigden one night after the long, fatiguing drill was over. "We had forty men in line to-night, and I think we went through the school of the company in a very creditable way, if some of us are green. Couldn't we get up a street parade

just to show the Toxophilites that some folks can do things as well as others?"

The captain was Frank Noble, and a very good drill-master he had proved himself to be; although he was hardly strict enough to suit a veteran, seeing that he permitted his men to smoke in the ranks.

"I have been thinking about that," replied the captain, as the young archers gathered about him after putting their long bows away in the lockers. "But I think it would be better to wait awhile. It will not be long before the lake will be frozen over, and then we will give an exhibition drill on the ice. What's the matter with that?"

"Nothing," shouted all the boys. "It's the very thing."

"Well, then, in order to accustom ourselves to the movements and evolutions, let every fellow bring his rollers next Thursday night, and we will see what we can do with them."

The boys thought it the best thing they had ever heard of, but Scott had a suggestion to make.

"Why can't we rent the rink for a few

nights?" said he. "This armory is hardly large enough, and besides, the floor isn't as smooth as it might be."

"We could engage the rink, of course," replied the captain. "But if we do, the Toxophilites will find out what is going on, and we don't want them to know any thing about it."

"Why, as to that, they are bound to know about it," said Tom. "We can't keep it from them. You know what a fearful noise rollers make, don't you?"

"Well, we can't help that," answered Frank. "If we do our drilling here, they can't look through the windows and see what we are about, as they could if we drilled at the rink. Now, if you want to go into this, you must be on hand every night. I will promise to get you in fine trim by the time the ice is in condition, if you will only attend to business."

"I wonder if we couldn't get up a competitive drill with the Toxophilites?" said Loren.

"Not much," replied Prime, with a laugh.

“There are too many raw recruits among us.”

“We’ll wait and give them a pull for something at the next canoe meet,” said Tom.

“You don’t expect to enter for any of the prizes next summer, do you?”

“Of course I do,” replied Tom, “and so do my cousins. We have sent to New London for a rowing machine, and intend to keep up our practice all winter.”

“You might as well make kindling wood of that rowing machine when it comes to hand, for it will not do you any good as far as winning a prize from Joe Wayring is concerned,” said Scott. “You can’t race with him.”

“I’ll see how that is,” answered Tom, who was thinking about one thing while Scott was thinking about another. “I was under the impression that when our new club was organized, it was the sentiment of the members that we were to challenge their best men for every thing. Before we can do that, it will be necessary to have a series of trial races among ourselves in order to determine who stand the best

chance of winning, and I calculate to be one of the select few."

"I believe some of the fellows did speak about that, but it was all talk," said Captain Noble. "You see, Tom, you and I have been ruled out of every thing by the referee's decision on the day of the meet, and you don't suppose that our friends here are going to take part in sports that we can't have a hand in, do you? Haven't we promised to stand by one another?"

"Oh," said Tom, "I didn't know what Scott meant, but I understand the matter now. The others won't compete because you and I can't. I am glad to hear it."

"Of course we are not barred out of any thing except the sports that take place during the canoe meet," added Prime. "We can play ball or lawn tennis or polo with them. We can send a team to beat them at target shooting, and we can enter our sail-boats for prizes in the regatta; but I, for one, don't care to. I've had quite enough of that crowd, and think we can see all the fun we want among ourselves."

“I think so, too,” said Tom. “I don’t care for their old canoe club, but I should really like to see the Toxophilites go to pieces. I’d see Joe Wayring happy before he should come into this club with my vote.”

If Tom Bigden could have stepped across the street and up the stairs that led to the neatly furnished armory and drill-room in which the Toxophilites were at that moment sitting down to an oyster supper that some of the new members had provided for them, he would, perhaps, have been very much disappointed to discover that the organization he hated so cordially because he could not get into it, was not only in no danger of falling to pieces, but that it was stronger than it had ever been before. The vacancies occasioned by the resignation of Frank Noble and his friends, had been promptly filled by good fellows, who had waited long and patiently for an opportunity to send in their names. More than that (and this was something that made Tom and his cousins very angry when they found it out), the constitution had been amended so that the membership could be increased to a hundred.

The Toxophilites were determined that the Mount Airy Scouts (that was the name of the new club), should not beat them if they could help it; but still they did not take in every one who applied for admission, as the Scouts did.

During the winter Tom Bigden and his cousins, who grew more vindictive and unreasonable in their hatred as time progressed, waged a secret but incessant warfare upon Joe Wayring and his two chums. They coaxed Mars from the post-office to the drug-store, and sent him home with a tin can tied to his tail. They practiced with their long bows at Roy Sheldon's fan-tail and tumbler pigeons as often as the birds ventured over to their side of the lake. They went across on their skates one night, and overturned the *Young Republic*, which Joe had hauled out on the beach and housed for the winter; and they even thought seriously of setting fire to his boat-house, believing that the blame would be laid upon Matt Coyle, who was known to be trapping somewhere in the mountains. Joe knew who it was that insulted Mars and shot at the pigeons and

disturbed his sail-boat ; but when he saw by the marks on the door of the boat-house that somebody had been trying to pull out the staple that held the hasp, he told his chums that he had wronged Tom and his cousins by his suspicions, and that the squatter was the culprit after all. Beyond a doubt Matt wanted to regain possession of the canvas canoe ; and in order to save his property, Joe shouldered it one morning and took it up to his room.

The attentive reader, if I am so fortunate as to have one, will bear in mind that all I have thus far written is but a repetition of the story the canvas canoe told me on that bright afternoon when I was first introduced to him and to the other merry fellows—the long bows, the snow-shoes and the toboggan—who found a home in Joe Wayring's room. In concluding his interesting narrative the canoe said :

“ Now, Fly-rod, you know every thing of importance that has happened since Tom Bigden and his cousins first stuck their quarrelsome noses inside Mount Airy. As I said at the start, it was necessary that you should hear the story, or else you would be at a loss to

account for a good many things that may happen to you sooner or later. I have an idea that you are a good sort, and hope we shall pass many pleasant hours in each other's company."

I thanked the canoe for his kind wishes and for the story he had taken so much pains to tell me, and inquired how he had managed to live through the long winter that had just passed.

"Oh, I did well enough," was his reply. "In the first place, the long bows and I had much to talk about, and in the next, Joe often brings Roy and Arthur up here to spend an evening; and as they have traveled a good deal, they are never at a loss for some interesting topic of conversation. More than that, Joe and his uncle went off hunting last December, and when they returned, they brought with them those conceited things over there—the snow-shoes and toboggan—who being from another country, think they are a trifle better than any body else. But, after all, I have found them to be very companionable fellows, and if you can only get them started (like all Englishmen, they are inclined to be surly at

first), they can tell you some things about shooting and trapping that are well worth listening to."

"Do you know what the programme is for the summer?" I asked, being somewhat anxious to learn what I had to look forward to. "Where are we going and what are we going to do?"

"Well, seeing that this is April, it will not be summer for three months to come," replied the canoe. "But you need not expect to remain idle any longer than next Saturday. You and I will probably be employed in making short trips about the village until school closes for the long vacation. Immediately after the canoe meet, which in future will be held on the 3rd of July, so that the members of the club can have the whole of the vacation to themselves, you and Joe will go up to Indian Lake—"

"But Matt Coyle is up there," I interrupted.

"Suppose he is!" retorted the canvas canoe. "Do you think that Joe Wayring is going to be kept away from his favorite fishing grounds

just because that outlaw has chosen to take up his abode there ! You don't know Joe. He'll go, you may be sure, and after he gets there, he'll give you a chance to show what you can do with a five pound trout."

"Why can't you go?" I inquired. I had already learned to like my new friend, who had shown himself to be so good-natured and so ready to tell me any thing I wanted to know, and I thought I would rather have him for company than any body else.

"It is possible that I may go, but I haven't heard any thing said about it. I should think I might be of some use to Joe and I would not be at all in his way."

"But what if that squatter should steal you again ? I suppose you didn't fare very well while you were in his hands."

"Oh, I fared well enough," replied the canoe, who seemed to have a happy faculty of accommodating himself to circumstances.

"But I didn't like the company I was obliged to keep, I tell you. Whenever Matt Coyle or his boys took me out on the water, I would have been only too glad to spill them out if I

could have done it. I felt particularly savage on the night Jake used me in making his raid on that old guide's potato-patch and smoke-house. When I saw the skiff coming after me, wouldn't I have laughed if I had possessed the power? I knew that Jake was going to run me on to that snag, and when I was settling to the bottom, I told myself that Joe would never leave me there. I wasn't hurt at all. I was easily mended with rosin and tallow and a piece of canvas, and am just as good as I ever was; although I confess that I look like a boy who has been in a fight and has to wear a patch over his eye."

"How did the squatter make the journey from his shanty to the creek in which Joe found you?"

"Well, he carried me on his back from the pond to the river. It took him two days to do it, for I hindered him all I could by catching hold of every limb and bush that came within my reach. When we got to the river, Matt loaded me to the water's edge with his household goods (you will know how I shrank from contact with them when I tell you that

the blankets and quilts were so begrimed with smoke and dirt that Mars could not be hired to sleep on them), and then one of the boys got in and paddled me down the stream while the squatter and the rest of his family stumbled along the bank. Matt was afraid to make his camp anywhere near Indian Lake, because he knew that the guides would be very likely to burn or otherwise destroy every thing he had, as they did once before ; so he turned up the creek, and hunted around until he found a place that suited him. It was in a secluded glen, about a quarter of a mile from the creek. He set his boys to work to build a lean-to, which would afford them some sort of shelter until they could provide a better covering for their heads, and started out with his rifle to get something to eat. During his rambles he found a smoke-house and potato-patch which he thought could be easily robbed, and as soon as he came home, he sent Jake out on that thieving expedition which resulted disastrously to him, for he lost his plunder and me into the bargain. I assure you I was glad to find myself among friends

once more. Why, have you any idea what that villain meant to do? He was going to make a pirate of me. He intended, first, to offer himself as guide for the hotels, and if they wouldn't take him, he intended to follow the guests and their guides along the water courses, and rob every camp that he found unprotected. That's the kind of fellow Matt Coyle is. He ought to be abolished."

"What became of the fishing-rods he stole at the time he ran off with you?"

"Well, they had worse treatment than I did, because they were not as useful as I was. They have been left out in the rain and abused in various ways, until they don't look much as they did when the squatter first got his ugly hands upon them. I doubt very much if their owners would have recognized them if they could have seen them the last time I did."

"Will our trip to Indian Lake last all summer?" I asked.

"Oh, no; only about two weeks. After that, we shall be packed off on a long journey, either East or West, I don't know which, and neither did Joe the last time I heard him say any

thing about it. You see, Uncle Joe Wayring owns large tracks of timber land in Maine and Michigan. He wants to see them both, for he has learned that thieves are at work in both places; but he hasn't yet made up his mind which he wants to see the more. When he does he will tell Joe, and then we shall find out where we are going."

There were a good many other questions that I wanted to ask my communicative friend, but before I could speak again a merry whistle sounded in the hall below, and somebody ascended the stairs three at a time. Then I knew that my master had finished his sail on the lake, and was coming up to his room to get ready for supper. He threw the door open with a bang, school-boy fashion, and walking straight up to me took me from my case and gave me a good looking over. He seemed as delighted as a youngster with his first pair of red top boots; but I was somewhat chagrined to learn that he did not have a very exalted opinion of my capabilities.

"That's a very fine rod, no doubt; but I expect to break him into a dozen pieces before

I have had him a month. A two pound trout will give him more than he wants to do."

What else Joe was going to say about me I never knew; for just then the supper bell rang, and he made all haste to put me back in my case. After a hasty toilet he bolted out of the room with the same noise and racket he made when he came in, and I was at liberty to continue my conversation with the canvas canoe. As usual, that useful and talkative individual spoke first.

"What is your opinion of a boy who can deliberately persecute a fellow like that?" said he.

"He ought to receive the same punishment you want meted out to Matt Coyle; he ought to be abolished," I replied. "But Joe doesn't appear to think much of me."

"Don't you worry about that," said the canoe, encouragingly. "You will not wonder at it when you have made the acquaintance of his bait-rod—if you ever do; I mean the one that was stolen from him. He's a big heavy fellow, and strong enough to jerk a four pound

black bass from the water without any nonsense. You can't do that, and Joe isn't certain that he can handle you. He doesn't distrust you any more than he distrusts himself. There's one thing I forgot to tell you," added the canoe, "and that is, if any misfortune befalls you, you can lay it to Tom Bigden. I heard enough during my short captivity to satisfy me that he was the chap who put it into Matt's head to steal Joe's property. Matt is bad enough, goodness knows; but the advice Tom Bigden gave him made him worse. That is one of the secrets of which I spoke at the beginning of my story, and it troubles me all the time. I am sure that if I could talk to Joe about five minutes, I should feel easier; but that's something I can't do."

At my request the historian then went on to tell of other interesting and exciting incidents in Joe Wayring's life, but as they have no bearing with my own exploits and adventures I omit them now, although they may appear at some future period. By the time he grew weary of talking it was ten o'clock, and darkness had settled down over the room; but just

as I was composing myself for the night, the door opened and Joe Wayring came in. Making good his boast, that if folks would let his property alone, he could find any thing he wanted on the darkest of nights and without the aid of a lamp, Joe caught up the creel with one hand, seized me with the other, and carrying us both down-stairs, deposited us on the kitchen table beside something that was covered with a snow-white cloth. Then he busied himself for a few minutes about the stove, getting kindling and light wood together so that a fire could be readily started ; and after I had watched his movements for a while, I made up my mind that a campaign of some sort was in prospect. When he took the light and went out I said to the creel :

“Do you happen to know what day this is ?”

“It’s Friday,” he replied. “To-morrow will be Saturday, and I should judge by the looks of things, that we are going to make our first trip after trout.”

Do you know by experience how a youngster feels when he is about to be called up before a hundred or more critical school mates to recite his little piece beginning—

“You’d scarce expect a boy like me
To get up here where all can see,
And make a speech as well as those
Who wear the largest kind of clothes.”

Do you know how he feels? Well, that’s the
way I felt.

CHAPTER XV.

MY FIRST TRIP TO INDIAN LAKE.

THE next morning, just as the clock was striking the hour of four, I was aroused from a reverie into which I had fallen by a hasty step, followed by a blinding glare of light, and Joe Wayring came hurrying into the kitchen. He didn't look much as he did the last time I saw him, and if it hadn't been for his curly head and blue eyes, I don't think I should have recognized him. But he was a nobby looking fellow, all the same, dressed as he was in a neat suit of duck, dyed to a dead grass shade, a light helmet with a peak before and behind, and leggings and gaiters instead of boots. Joe was not the boy to make himself uncomfortable, or to go about in a ragged coat and with his hair sticking out of the top of his cap, just because he intended to spend the day in the

woods out of sight of every body. He knew of anglers and hunters who affected that style, and they could follow it, if they wanted to, but he wouldn't. Leggings and gaiters were easier to walk in than heavy boots, and whole clothes looked better than shabby ones.

Placing the lamp on the table Joe began bustling about the kitchen, and in a very few minutes the fire was started and the tea-kettle filled. Then he threw back the cloth before spoken of, revealing a substantial lunch, a liberal portion of which he proceeded to pack away in the creel.

About the time the coffee was ready, the door opened again, and Uncle Joe came in. He, too, was dressed for the woods, and carried a rod of some sort in one hand and a creel in the other. The latter must have been a fine looking article in his day, but how he was as weather-beaten as any old sailor. And that was not to be wondered at, for he had traveled much, and had seen many hardships. He had accompanied his master from one end of the country to the other. He had held captive for him many a nice breakfast of

grayling captured in Michigan waters, and carried his dinner while he was fighting with the big trout in Rangeley Lakes. He went with him on one of his Western tours, and would certainly have fallen into the hands of the Utes when they arose in rebellion and massacred all the whites they could find, had it not been for the fact that he was slung over his master's shoulder, and the latter was in too great a hurry to stop and throw him off. He had many thrilling recollections of the Indian Lake country, for he had been capsized on the rapids more times than he could remember. He was a good talker, and as full of stories as the canvas canoe.

"Well, sir," said Uncle Joe, as he deposited his rod and creel on the table, "what are the prospects?"

"Couldn't be better," replied the boy. "It's cloudy, and there is every sign of rain before noon."

"I hope it will stay cloudy, but I can't say that I want to see it rain," said Uncle Joe, as he drew a chair up to the table and took the cup of coffee his nephew poured out for him.

"The bushes around the old spring hole are pretty thick, and I long ago ceased to see any fun in getting drenched for the sake of catching a mess of half-pound trout. If they were salmon, now, the case would be different."

Nevertheless Uncle Joe seemed to be in just as great a hurry to eat his breakfast and be off as his nephew was. Ten minutes sufficed to satisfy their appetites, and in ten minutes more we were on the outskirts of the village, and moving up an old log road toward the spring hole, where I was to make my first attempt to take a fish. I dreaded the ordeal, for I did not have as much confidence in myself as I would have had if my master had not spoken so slightly of me.

How far it was from the village to the spring hole, I am sure I don't know. It seemed like a long journey to me, although it was enlivened by stories of travel and adventure from Uncle Joe, in which I became deeply interested. Presently Joe, who was leading the way, pushed aside the bushes in front of him, disclosing to view a small body of water fringed with lily-pads and surrounded on all sides by

high and thickly wooded hills ; and I knew instinctively that we had reached the end of our tramp, and that the time had come for me to show what I could do. There seemed to be abundant opportunity for me to do good work if I was capable of it. While I was being taken out of my case, I noticed that now and then there was a slight commotion in the water, just outside the lilies, and I knew it was occasioned by trout jumping from the water, even before Joe Wayring said so.

“Just look at them !” he exclaimed, in great excitement. “They are having a high old time among themselves. I wouldn’t take a dollar for my chance of going home with a full creel. There ! Did you see that whopper ?”

“Put on a white miller and a brown hackle, and give me your rod as quick as you can,” answered his uncle. “I saw him, and if he comes up again within seventy or eighty feet of us, I will make an effort to take him.”

“Do you mean to say that you can throw a fly as far as that ?” inquired Joe.

“That depends upon the rod. I’d like to have the first try with it, if you have no objec-

tion, for I want to see whether or not you've got a good bargain."

Of course Joe had no objection. As soon as I was ready for business he passed me over to his uncle, and when I felt his strong fingers close around me, I knew that I was in the hands of one who would make me show off to the best possible advantage.

"There he is again! Give him the flies, quick!" cried Joe, suddenly.

Uncle Joe's movements were characterized by what sportsmen are wont to call "deliberate quickness". He was so very deliberate, in fact, that his nephew began to show unmistakable signs of impatience; but still he did not waste a single second of valuable time. Reeling off as much line as the close proximity of the bushes behind would permit him to use, Uncle Joe gave me a smart upward and backward fling and then struck down toward the water. This movement caused the line to fly through the air like a whip lash, only it grew in length all the while; and when the flies were directly over the swirl the trout had made when he went down, the motion of the reel was

stopped by a slight pressure of the angler's thumb, and the tempting lures settled upon the water as lightly as a couple of feathers.

"I never can learn to do that," said Joe, despondingly. "It requires altogether too much skill for my clumsy—Well, sir, you've got him as sure as the world."

The hook was fast to something, that was plain ; but I thought at first that Uncle Joe had caught a snag or a lily-pad. There was a jerk that made me wonder, and in an instant more I was bent almost half double ; but with all the strain that was brought to bear upon me, the thing at the other end of the line, whatever it was, did not give an inch. On the contrary, it started and ran off toward the middle of the spring hole ; and then I began to realize that I was doing battle with a trout of the largest size. Now was the time to show my master that he had been much mistaken in me.

I need not stop to go into the particulars of the fight, for every boy who has caught a heavy trout on a light rod will know just what happened ; and besides, to be frank with you, I don't remember much about it. Neither does

Joe Wayring, who was so highly excited that he could not stand still. I recollect he afterward told his chums that the fish jumped clear out of the water two or three times, and then started from the middle of the spring hole and ran toward the angler at the top of his speed, trying to loosen the line so that the hook would drop out of his mouth; but the automatic reel took up the slack as fast as he made it, and his mad rushes about the spring hole had no other result than to tire him out, so that he could offer but feeble resistance when he was reeled in to the bank. The moment he was brought within reach Joe slipped a landing net under him and lifted him out.

“Two pounds and three ounces,” he almost shouted, after he had weighed him on his pocket scales. “Now, Uncle Joe, what’s your opinion of that rod?”

“A fair sized fish for these waters,” said Uncle Joe, as he stepped to the edge of the spring hole for another cast. “As for the rod—it’s as good a one as you need wish for. If you will take care of him, he will last as long as you will, barring accident.”

I will not dwell upon the incidents of the day, for I must hasten on to tell you what happened to me during my first visit to Indian Lake. It will be enough to say that Joe and his uncle enjoyed themselves, as they always did whenever they went anywhere together, and that my master after an hour or two of assiduous practice, learned to make short casts with tolerable accuracy, and to show considerable skill in handling the fish he hooked. When the two went home a little before dark Joe's creel was not as full as his uncle's, but the few trout he captured with his light tackle, afforded him more genuine sport than twice the number of bass taken on a heavy bait-rod.

That day was the beginning of a busy season for me. Every Saturday, rain or shine, found me at the spring hole or wandering along the banks of some of the numerous streams that ran into Mirror Lake. I caught a good many fish, soon got over my nervousness, and looked forward to the long summer vacation with as much impatience as Joe himself. It came at last, being ushered in by a canoe meet on the

3d of July, and a grand parade on the 4th, in which the Toxophilites and Scouts both took part. There was a good deal of rivalry between these two organizations—so much, indeed, that the usual exhibition drill at the park was given by the military company, thus putting it out of the power of either club to crow over the other. But still there was considerable crowing done, especially by Tom Bigden and a few envious fellows like him.

“Don’t you remember what vociferous applause the Toxophilites received last 4th?” said he, to his cousins.

“Yes; and I remember how mad you were about it, too,” replied Loren.

“I know it. I couldn’t bear to see them throw on so many airs, but I little thought that I should aid in making them take back seats at their next parade. I have yet to see any one who will say that the Scouts didn’t do just as fine marching in the procession as the Toxophilites did.”

Of course I did not see the parade, and neither did I witness the sports that were held during the canoe meet, for I was shut up in Joe’s

room so far from a window that I could not tell what was going on out-doors. But I heard the music of the band, and the cheers that arose whenever some lucky fellow carried off a prize, and the exciting and amusing incidents that happened during those two days of festivity, were so often talked of in my hearing, that I was pretty well posted after all. I was glad to learn that my master won the paddle race very easily, and that he pushed Roy and Arthur so closely in the hurry-scurry race that the referee had half a mind to order another contest. But Joe and Arthur said that Roy was ahead, and as the other boys backed them up, Roy was awarded the prize. There was no attempt at fouling this time. Every thing was conducted fairly, as it always had been previous to Tom Bigden's arrival in the village, and every member of the club won or lost on his merits.

The parade being over, there was nothing to keep Joe and his two chums at home, and on the evening of the 4th they began making preparations for their annual trip to Indian Lake. Shortly after supper Joe Wyring came into the room, and having exchanged his uniform

for a suit of working clothes, he shouldered my friend, the canvas canoe, and carried him down stairs. Half an hour later he came back after the creel and me. He took us down to the boat-house and there we found the canoe, snugly tucked away in his chest like a tired boy in his little bed.

“Hurrah for me!” exclaimed the canoe, after Joe had gone out locking the door behind him. “I am going to Indian Lake, too. Now, if Joe can only keep clear of Matt Coyle, we’ll see some fun before we get back. You think you know something about fishing; but wait until you get hold of one of those big lake trout, and then tell me what you think about it.”

That was just what I wanted to do, but I didn’t say so, for fear that when the time came I might discover that I was not quite so good a rod as I thought I was.

We were so very impatient to be off that the night was a very long one to us; but at the first peep of day we heard Joe’s step as he came down the walk toward the boat-house. He placed a basket of provisions on the wharf, mildly scolded Mars for making such a fuss

over the coming separation, and then came in after us. Arthur Hastings, Jim and the skiff were on time, as they always were, and in half an hour more we had taken Roy Sheldon on board and were moving gayly down the river. We camped for the night at the old perch hole, where the skiff had ridden out that furious storm a year before, and the boys had fish for supper. Joe had been told that perch would rise to a red ibis, but he and I could not prove the truth of the assertion. Although Arthur and Roy pulled out the fish as fast as they could bait their hooks, Joe never 'got a bite. The reason was, the water was too deep. His uncle afterward told him that six feet is about as far as any fish can be relied upon to rise to a fly ; and sometimes they are too lazy to come from that depth.

On the afternoon on the fourth day we left the river and turned into a little creek, whose current was so swift that the boys were obliged to use extra exertion in order to make headway against it. About an hour after the sun went down we came to anchor in the mouth of a brook, and there I made amends for my failure

at the perch hole. I captured more trout than both the other rods, and if I had felt so inclined, could have returned some of the left-handed compliments they paid me when it was found that I could not catch a perch in twenty feet of water; but being peaceably disposed I said nothing. While the tent was being put up, a muffled voice came from the chest in which the canvas canoe was packed away. The cover being shut down, I had to listen intently in order to catch what he said to me.

"Didn't I hear some one say something about trout?" asked the canoe.

"I think it very likely," was my reply. "There are lots of them in the brook; almost as many as there in the spring hole at Mount Airy."

"Then I know where we are," said my imprisoned friend. "Did you see an ugly looking snag about a mile below? Well, there's one there, and it's the one Jake Coyle ran into the night I was sunk in the creek. The fight I told you about took place right here. Have you seen or heard any thing of the squatter?"

“No, I haven’t; but I know that Joe and his friends are keeping a bright lookout for him.”

“I am glad to hear it, and I hope they will not relax their vigilance just because Matt keeps himself out of sight. His shanty is over there in the woods on the right hand side of the creek. I’ll bet he is there now, and that he has had his eye on the skiff ever since she came into this part of the country. Mark my words: Joe will hear from him before he sees Mount Airy again.”

“Oh, I hope not,” said I.

“So do I,” answered the canoe. “But I became well enough acquainted with Matt and his family during the short time I lived with them, to know that they do not intend to leave here unless they are driven away, as they were last year when they came to our village. Why, this is the best place in the world for a man who is too lazy to work, and who is not above taking things without leave. Game and fish are abundant. All the guides cultivate little patches of ground, and keep a few pigs and chickens, and as they are away from home a

good part of the time, their property is left to the care of their wives and children. They can't stand guard day and night, and consequently it is no trouble at all for Matt to steal all he wants. He has a fine hiding-place now, and as he and his family make it a point to travel different routes every time they go away from the shanty or return to it, they don't leave much of a trail for the guides to follow, if they should make up their minds to hunt them up. Another thing," added the canoe, in a tone of anxiety, "Matt hates Joe and his chums for two reasons: First, because their fathers turned him out of Mount Airy, and second, because they gave him such a pelting with potatoes the last time they were up here. If he is here, he will try to have revenge for that; now you see if he doesn't."

The canvas canoe spoke confidently, and his words occasioned me no little uneasiness; but I was greatly relieved to learn from the conversation, to which I listened while the boys were eating supper, that they were fully alive to the dangers of the situation, and that they did not mean to let the squatter take them off their

guard. They were happy in the belief that Matt could not attack them, except at long range, because he had no boat to bring him alongside the skiff. It never occurred to them that he had had plenty of time to steal or build one, and that was where they made their mistake.

Up to this time we had had pleasant weather ; but this particular night was a rainy one. The big drops began coming down just after the tent was put up. Then I realized for the first time what a comfortable home it was that the boys had provided for themselves. The canvas canoe and I lay on the forward locker, with the two bait-rods, the dip-net and the cocker spaniel to keep us company. On the bottom of the boat in the cock-pit sat the three chums, on either side of a table which they had made by pushing the movable thwarts close together. On the table, which was covered with a white napkin, was an array of dishes, plates and cups, all of tin, which were filled to overflowing with ham sandwiches, bread and butter, cake, ripe fruit of various kinds and trout, done to a turn. On the stern locker stood the

little stove over which Arthur had cooked the fish and made the tea, and above it hung the jack-lamp that was kept burning all night. If any thing happened—if the wind arose and the anchor dragged, or prowlers of any sort came about—the boys wanted a light to work by. Over all was the tent, with the rain coming gently down on the top of it. One side curtain was rolled up to admit the air, but the other was buttoned securely to the gunwale. Joe wasn't going to have the squatter slip up and send a club into the cock-pit before he knew it. Taken altogether it was a cozy, home-like scene, and I no longer wondered why it was that Joe and his friends looked forward to the summer vacation with such lively anticipations of pleasure.

The boys slept soundly that night, lulled by the pattering of the rain on the roof over their heads, but the sun did not find them in bed. I caught more than my share of the trout they ate for breakfast, and that afternoon was given an opportunity to try my skill on larger game, to wit, a four pound black bass. I may add, too, that I got my first ducking, and witnessed

the liveliest kind of a foot race. But I can't say that I enjoyed it; there was too much depending on it.

"Do you remember the last time we ate breakfast here?" said Joe, as he drew up the anchor while his companions shipped the oars and pulled up the creek toward the pond. "If my memory serves me, Matt Coyle made the mouth of this brook uncomfortably warm for us for a few minutes. What would we have done if Roy hadn't been smart enough to keep some of the potatoes out of that bag? I wonder where the old chap is now?"

"Probably he is a hundred miles away," answered Arthur. "You don't suppose that the people who live around the lake are going to let him stay here and steal them out of house and home, do you?"

"I am of the opinion that he and his worthless family were driven away from here long ago," said Roy. "But still I don't believe in trusting any thing to luck. We needn't go ashore unless we want to, and Matt can't bother us while we are lying at anchor. He's got no boat, and he isn't foolish enough to

swim off to us, for we gave him a lesson the last time we were here that he will remember as long as he lives."

We left the mouth of the brook at an early hour, and about four in the afternoon entered the pond, where I heard Joe say we would remain until the bread and bacon gave out, when we would go over to Indian Lake and lay in a fresh supply. Now Joe was sorry that he had left his bait-rod behind. The pond was noted for the number and fighting qualities of its bass, and Joe had nothing to catch them with; at least that was what he told his friends, adding that he was afraid to trust so heavy work to me.

"You'd better be afraid," assented Roy. "If you don't want that fine rod of yours smashed into a thousand pieces, you had better not try to catch a bass with it. But I'll tell you what you might do, if you don't care to sit idly here while Art. and I catch all the fish and see all the fun. You might go up to the little perch hole and throw a fly there. Perhaps you will find the perch in the pond more accommodating than they were back there in the river."

“How about our esteemed friend, the squatter?” said Arthur.

“Oh, he can’t trouble me,” answered Joe, who was already preparing to act upon Roy’s suggestion. “His shanty is away off there somewhere, while the perch hole lies a mile or more in the opposite direction. There is a wide and deep river between the two, and how is Matt going to cross it without a boat? I am of Roy’s opinion that he was driven away from here long ago.”

While Joe was talking in this way he had taken the canvas canoe from his chest, and now under his skillful hands my old friend was fast assuming his usual symmetrical proportions. In less than ten minutes he was floating gracefully alongside the skiff.

“Come on, Fly-rod,” said he, “and I will show you what a canvas canoe can do when he is managed by some one who understands his business. You never took a ride with me, did you?”

No, I never had, and if the truth must be told, I never wanted to take a second ride with him. He may have been “the boss boat” on

the rapids, as he often boasted, but he was a very unfortunate craft all the same, and before the day was over I had reason to believe that Joe would have seen more sport during his two weeks' outing if he had left the canoe safe in his room at Mount Airy. I came back to the skiff, but he didn't.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN EXPLOIT AND A SURPRISE.

AS I could not comply with my friend's invitation to "come on", I was obliged to wait until Joe had exchanged his heavy boots for the buckskin moccasins he always wore whenever he went anywhere with the canoe. This being done, we pushed away from the skiff, and moved leisurely up the pond toward the perch hole, Joe whistling merrily as he plied the paddle. I do not think he was quite so light-hearted when he came back.

Half an hour's paddling sufficed to bring us to our destination. If I hadn't heard Joe say that the perch hole was located in the mouth of a creek, I should not have known it, for it looked to me more like an arm of the pond which set back into the land. When I was taken from my case, after the anchor had been dropped overboard, I took note of the fact that

one could not see more than twenty or thirty feet up the creek, a high wooded point limiting the range of vision in that direction. I didn't know at the time why I observed this, but I thought of it afterward.

Joe made his first cast with a scarlet ibis, and the result was surprising to both of us. The fish that took the lure did not give much of a bite—I have known a half-pound trout to seize the bait with more vim than he did—but when Joe fastened the hook with a scientific twist of his wrist, I couldn't have doubled up quicker if he had caught a log.

“Scotland's a burning! what's that?” exclaimed Joe, speaking so rapidly that the words seemed to come out all at once. “I declare, it's a bass,” he added a moment later, as the green and bronze side of the beautiful captive could be seen for an instant just under the surface of the water. “I wish he was at the bottom of the pond, for he'll break my rod and I'll have no more fishing this trip.”

But Joe did not give up because he thought he was going to be worsted in the fight. He brought into play all the skill of which he was

master, and after an exciting struggle of fully half an hour's duration, caught up the landing net and hauled into the canoe the largest thing in the shape of a fish I had seen up to that time. He was killed at once, the pocket scales were brought into use, and the weight of the "catch" was written down in Joe's note-book.

"Whew?" panted the boy, pulling out his handkerchief and wiping the big drops of perspiration from his forehead. "If that wasn't a tough battle I wouldn't say so. I never supposed that little rod could catch a fish like this. Hello, here! It's getting dark already. I know the fellows will laugh at me for coming back with a single fish, but I don't believe they will be able to show one that will weigh more."

Joe jumped to his feet as he spoke, and made all haste to put me away in my case. He stood with his face to the pond while he worked, and consequently he did not see what I did. My attention was first called to it by an exclamation from the canvas canoe who said in a suppressed and excited whisper:

“Upon my word, there’s that everlasting Matt Coyle again. He’ll gobble the whole of us this time.”

I looked over Joe’s shoulder, and there in the bight of the bend, with its ugly nose just sticking around the high wooded point of which I have spoken, was a clumsy scow built of rough boards that had doubtless been stolen from some saw-mill. In the scow sat Matt Coyle and his two boys. I had heard them described so often that I should have recognized them at once, even if the canoe had not told me who they were. They held their paddles poised in the air, and Matt who sat in the bow, having raised his hand to attract the attention of his boys, was now pointing silently toward my master, and going through a series of contortions with his head and eyes that must have had a volume of meaning in them. At any rate Jake and Sam understood them, for they dipped their paddles into the water, and the scow moved around the point and turned directly toward us, while the squatter prepared himself for business by taking off his hat and pushing back his sleeves. I trembled all over

with excitement and alarm, and so did the canoe.

“ Oh, why don’t Joe turn around ?” cried the latter. “ Matt intends to take him by surprise, and he’ll be alongside in half a minute more.”

Just then one of the boys allowed his paddle to rub against the side of the scow. The noise he made was very slight, but it was loud enough to attract the attention of Joe Wayring, who faced about to find his enemies within less than twenty feet of him. He was so astonished to see them there, that for a few seconds he could neither move nor speak. He stood as motionless and silent as a wooden boy ; while Matt, seeing that he was discovered, snatched up his paddle and raised a yell of triumph.

“ Now I reckon I’ll have my boat back an’ you into the bargain,” he shouted, swinging his paddle around his head and then shaking it savagely at Joe. “ When I get my hands onto you, the way I’ll wear the hickories out on your back will extonish you wuss nor any thing you ever see.”

“ An’ won’t I punch your head though, to

pay you fur hittin' me with that there tater up there in the creek last summer?" chimed in Jake. "I guess yes."

These threatening words called Joe to his senses. He knew that he would not have time to pull up the anchor and escape in his canoe, for he had paid out a good deal of rope in order to place himself in the best possible position for casting, and before he could haul it in, his enemies would be upon him. There was but one way to elude them, and that was to take to the water and to trust to his powers as a swimmer. It looked like a slim chance, but the odds of three against one were too heavy to be successfully resisted, and what else could he do? As quick as a flash he turned again, and without releasing his hold upon me, took a header from the stern of the canoe.

"So that there's your game, is it?" yelled the squatter. "Wal, it suits us, I reckon. Never mind the boat, Jakey. She's fast anchored, and will stay there till we want her. Take after the 'ristocrat whose dad won't let honest folks live onto his land less'n they've got a pocketful of money to pay him fur it.

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Jest let me get a good whack at him with my paddle an' he'll stop, I bet you. Hold on, there, 'cause it'll be wuss fur you if you don't."

In obedience to Matt's instructions the scow was turned toward the swimmer ; but although Jake and Sam exerted themselves to the utmost, they could not cut him off from the shore. Joe made astonishing headway. There were but few boys, or men either, in Mount Airy who could swim as fast as he could, and he afterward said that he never made better time than he did when he was trying to get away from Matt and his boys. He was afraid of the lily-pads which lined the banks of the creek on both sides, so he swam down the stream until he was clear of them before he attempted to make a landing; but Matt, believing that he could do better on shore, dropped his own paddle into the water, turned into the lilies and tried to force the scow through them. That was a lucky thing for Joe Wayring. The strong stems of the lilies were entwined about one another in all sorts of ways, and the squatter stuck fast in them before he had made half a dozen strokes.

“Back out! Back out!” shouted Matt, who was quickly made aware that he had committed a blunder. “Be in a hurry, or he’ll get sich a start on us that we can’t never ketch him. Hold up, there!” he went on, jumping to his feet and swinging his paddle around his head as if he were on the point of launching it at the object of his wrath. “Come back, or it’ll be wuss fur you. You hear me, I reckon.”

In the meantime Joe made good his landing, and looked over his shoulder to see the heavy paddle coming toward him, end over end. It struck the ground near him, and was immediately sent back where it came from with all the force that the boy’s sinewy arm could give it. Flying wide of the mark for which it was intended, the broad blade hit Jake fairly in the face, giving him such a splitting headache that he could not take part in the pursuit that followed. This was another lucky thing for Joe. Jake was the best runner in the squatter’s family, and although there is not the slightest doubt that he would have been soundly thrashed if he had succeeded in overtaking Joe, he



JOE IN AN AWKWARD FIX.

might have been able to detain him until his father and brother could come to his assistance, and then Joe would have had more on his hands than he could attend to.

“That’s another thing we’ve got to pay you fur when we get our hands on you,” yelled Matt, who was almost beside himself. “Work lively in backin’ out, or he’ll have a mile the start of us before we tech the shore.”

Jake, who had dropped his paddle and sat holding his chin in his hands, paid no attention to the order; but Matt and Sam worked to such good purpose that they finally succeeded in backing the scow out of the lilies into clear water. When they reached the bank, Joe Wayring was out of sight; but they knew which way he had gone, and at once set out in pursuit; while Jake stayed in the scow and howled dismally.

Joe ran like a deer, and made surprising progress in spite of the logs and bushes that obstructed his way. He was very quiet in his movements, but Matt and his boy made so much noise that it was an easy matter to keep track of them and tell just how far they were

behind. At last the squatter, seeing that he was not going to capture my master by following him on foot, thought it best to change his tactics.

“Sam,” he shouted, in stentorian tones, “go back to the creek, and you an’ Jakey take the canoe an’ paddle down the pond so’s to cut him off when he tries to swim off to the skiff. You understand what I say to you, I reckon.”

Joe understood it, whether Sam did or not and it put new speed into him. He ran so swiftly that he very soon left his single pursuer out of hearing, but he exhausted himself in the effort, and when he dashed out of the bushes and stopped on the bank in plain sight of the skiff, he was so nearly out of breath that he could not raise a shout to draw the attention of his chums, who were hard at work putting up the tent. But Jim saw him, and announced the fact by a joyful bark, followed by a vigorous wagging of his tail. Arthur and Roy looked toward the bank, and there stood Joe, swinging his arms wildly about his head. When he saw that he had attracted

their notice, he pointed to the woods, and then up the pond toward the canvas canoe which was coming down with all the speed that Jake and Sam could give it. The boys in the skiff saw and understood. The anchor came up quicker than it ever did before, the oars were shipped, and the skiff came toward the bank with a heavy bone in her teeth. By this time Matt Coyle arrived within hearing again, and Joe, fearing that he might make his appearance before his friends could rescue him, stepped into the water and struck out to meet the skiff. Jake and Sam yelled savagely at him, and redoubled their efforts to place themselves between him and his friends ; but they might as well have saved their breath and strength. The skiff came up rapidly, and Joe knew that he was saved. Suddenly a bright idea suggested itself to him—one that would have enabled him to turn the tables upon the squatter very neatly, if his friends had only been prompt to act upon it. Raising himself as far out of the water as he could, he called out :

“ Boys, never mind me. I’ve got my second wind now, and can swim for an hour. Go up

there and capture my canoe, or else run over her and send her to the bottom. Don't let those villains take her away from me again."

"All right," replied Roy, still giving away strong on his oar. "We'll get your canoe back for you, but we will take care of you first."

"No, no!" insisted Joe. "Capture or sink the canoe first, and attend to me afterward. I am all right, I tell you. I can easily keep afloat until you come back."

"Why, boy, you haven't got a breath to spare," said Arthur. "I know it by the way you talk. Come in out of the wet."

"You held fast to your fly-rod through it all, didn't you?" said Roy, as he took me from Joe's hand.

"Yes. I didn't know whether or not I could outrun them, and I wanted something to defend myself with in case they came up with me."

When Joe tried to climb into the skiff, he found that he was by no means in as good condition as he thought he was. He could scarcely help himself at all, and his chums were obliged to pull him in by main strength. The moment they let go of him he sank down

against the stern locker and panted loudly ; but he was as full of determination as ever.

“Now go up and sink the canoe,” he almost gasped.

But a single glance was enough to show Arthur and Roy that it was too late to do any thing with the canoe. Jake and his brother heard the order that Joe shouted at his friends while he was in the water, and made all haste to put themselves out of harm's way. When Joe was hauled into the skiff they were so close to the shore that all attempts to intercept them would have been unavailing.

“It's no use, Joe,” said Arthur. “They're too far off, and there's Matt Coyle standing on the bank.”

“But for Joe's sake we will see what we can do,” exclaimed Roy.

As he spoke, he opened the forward locker and took from it a stout paper bag. When he first put it there, Arthur and Joe supposed that it contained lemons ; but when Roy opened it, they saw that it was filled with potatoes.

“They helped us out of a scrape once, and why shouldn't they do so again?” said Roy.

“My plan is to pull into shore, drive Matt and his boys into the bushes, clap onto the canoe with the boat-hook and tow her out into the pond.”

Arthur declared that that was the way to do it, but subsequent events proved that it wasn't. They laid hold of their oars again, but before the skiff had gone far toward the shore, Joe Wayring, who had by this time recovered his power of speech and motion, announced that Roy's plan wouldn't work at all, and that it was useless to make any effort to sink or capture the canoe. And the rowers found it so when they faced about and looked toward the shore.

The squatter and his boys had dragged the canoe from the water, and were now carrying her back into the bushes where they knew the boys would not dare go after it.

Matt had not yet forgotten the tactics they used when he and his boys tried to club them out of their boat the year before. He was very much afraid of Roy, and when the latter ceased rowing and got upon his feet to see what had been done with the canoe, Matt and

his allies ran into the woods like so many frightened turkeys.

"I'm onto your little game," said the squatter in a triumphant tone, as he looked out from behind the tree that sheltered him. "You don't fire no more taters at me if I know it. Your boat is here, an' if you want it wusser'n we do, come an' get it. 'Tain't much account nohow."

"I'm going to bust it into a million pieces to pay you fur that there whack you gin me with pap's paddle a while ago," shouted the invisible Jake, who would not show so much as the top of his cap to the boys in the skiff. "I've stood jest about all the poundin' I'm goin' to."

"What did you do to him, Joe?" inquired Arthur, as he and Roy turned the skiff around and pulled back toward their anchorage.

"Matt threw his paddle at me when he saw that I was about to slip through his fingers, and I threw it back," answered Joe. "It didn't hit Matt, as I meant it should, but it came pretty near knocking Jake out of the scow."

"The scow?" repeated Roy. "Have they got a boat of their own, I'd like to know."

Joe replied that they had a boat in their possession (of course he didn't know where they got it, or whether or not they had any right to call it their own), and then went on to tell of the exploit I had performed at the perch hole, and of the surprise that followed close upon the heels of it. He wound up his story by saying—

"I didn't have time to draw up my anchor, so I had to go overboard. I swam the best I knew how in order to reach the bank before Matt did; then I raced a mile or more through the woods in my wet clothes, and that was what tired me out."

"I wonder if we are to find that fellow hanging around every time we come into the woods?" said Roy, angrily. "Hallo, here!"

A slight splashing in the water drew their attention at the moment, and Joe and Arthur started up in alarm, expecting to find that the squatter and his boys had stolen a march upon them. There was a canoe close alongside of them, but the broad-shouldered, brown-

whiskered man who handled the paddle was not Matt Coyle or any body like him. He was one of the hotel guides who had assisted in driving the squatter out of the Indian Lake country, and he was looking for him now.

"Hallo yourself," he replied, good-naturedly. "Well, I swan to man, if there ain't Roy Sheldon and—Why, you're all here, ain't you? Say! seen any thing of Matt Coyle since you have been hanging around?"

"Mr. Swan, how are you?" exclaimed all the boys, in a breath. They knew the guide, and liked him, too.

"You have come to the right place to learn a good deal concerning Matt and his doings," continued Roy. "What has he been up to now?"

"Well, you see," answered the guide, speaking with so much deliberation that the impatient boys wanted to hurry him, "he came here last year from somewhere, and wanted to set in for a guide; but the hotels down to the lake wouldn't have him, 'cause they didn't think he was a safe man to trust with a boat, and Matt, he allowed that he'd fix things so't

there wouldn't be no guidin' for none of us to do. So he's took to the woods, and he robs every camp he can find, if there don't happen to be any body around to watch it. Leastwise we lay it to him, 'cause we know he's around here, and some of us thought that we'd like to take a peep at his shanty, if he's got one."

"We can't tell you where his shanty is," said Joe, "but we can show you where Matt and his boys were not ten minutes ago. He stole my canvas canoe and gave me a long chase through the woods. He promised that if he could get hold of me, he would wear a hickory out over my back."

"Sho!" exclaimed the guide. "What for?"

Joe's story was a long one, for in order to make the guide understand how he and his companions had incurred the enmity of the vindictive squatter, it was necessary that he should go back to the time when Matt and his family first made their appearance in Mount Airy. He described the fight between them and the constable and his posse, the particu-

lars of which he received from eye-witnesses ; told how Matt had stolen the canoe and six fine fishing-rods and reels, while he and his companions were looking for the bear they saw on the shore of Sherwin's Pond ; and gave a glowing account of the fight in the creek, at which the guide laughed heartily.

"I'll jest bet that them was my taters that you pelted him with," said he; "'cause while I was out in the woods with a guest from Boston, my wife said that my garden and smoke-house were both robbed in one night. As for them fish poles—I think I can tell you where to find them."

"Good for you, Mr. Swan," cried Arthur. "Where are they?"

"Of course, I don't know that they belong to you ; I only suspect it," continued the guide. "You see, one day last summer, Jake Coyle brung six as purty poles as you would want to look at up to the Sportsman's Home, and told Mr. Hanson, the new landlord, that he got 'em in a boat trade. He couldn't use 'em, fur they wasn't the kind that he'd been in the habit of handlin', and so he wanted to sell 'em.

I told Hanson that I was as sure as any thing could be that they had been stole, and that mebbe the owner would come along some day looking for them; so Hanson, he buys 'em, reels and all, for four dollars apiece—all except one that Jake said had been broke by a bass, and for that he give two dollars. They were covered with mud and rust, but I cleaned 'em up, and now they look as good as new."

"They are our rods, and I know it," exclaimed Roy. "If mine is the one that's broken, I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that I paid Jake for it in advance by hitting him in the mouth with that potato."

"And if it's mine, I settled with him this afternoon by slapping him in the face with his father's paddle," chimed in Joe Wayring.

The guide laughed again. "You're as plucky a lot of youngsters as I ever see," said he, "and you may rest assured that them folks won't bother you or any body else much longer. We are going to put 'em in jail for thieves when we catch 'em."

"Ah! Yes," said Arthur; "but that's right where you are going to see trouble. Our

deputy sheriff and constable searched every inch of the ground around Sherwin's Pond, and all they found was the place where Matt's shanty once stood. He set fire to it before he left for Indian Lake."

"I know that the woods about here are tolerable thick, and that Matt is a boss hand at hiding," replied the guide; "but he will find that there's a heap of difference between dodging a couple of townies, and in getting away from a lot of men who have lived in the woods ever since they were knee high to so many ducks. Go on, Joe. What else do you know about Matt Coyle?"

The rest of Joe's story related solely to the events of the evening, and it did not take him long to describe them. When he concluded the guide was almost as angry as he and his chums were. The idea that that worthless vagabond should threaten to beat such a boy as Joe Wayring, simply because he had showed the courage to defend himself when he was assaulted! The guide made no remark, but there was a look in his eye that would have made the squatter uneasy if he had been there to see it.

“It’s too late to do any thing to-night,” said he, at length. “I reckon you boys have got something good to eat in them lockers? I thought so. Well, suppose we go ashore and camp.”

Joe and his friends readily agreed to this proposition. They had spent five days and nights in their boat, and they longed for a good, sound sleep on a bed of balsam-boughs, with the spreading branches of some friendly pine for shelter instead of their water-proof tent. They were not afraid to go into camp on shore now that they had the stalwart guide for company. Matt and his boys would not be likely to show themselves as long as they knew that he was with them ; but the trouble was, they didn’t know it, although they were in plain sight when the boys built their fire on the bank, and laid their plans to pay them a visit before morning.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BATTLE IN THE DARK.

AS OUR three friends and their backwoods companion were old campaigners, they did not spend much time in getting ready for the night. A roaring fire was started, the jack-lamp hung upon a neighboring tree, and by the aid of the light thus afforded them, Joe Warring, who had by this time got into a suit of dry clothes, cleaned the fish which Arthur and Roy had captured during his absence; Arthur Hastings fried them and made the tea; Mr. Swan prepared the bacon and pancakes; and Roy cut the balsam boughs and arranged the beds. In less than three quarters of an hour after they drew their boats upon the beach, they sat down to a supper that would have tempted any healthy boy to eat, no matter whether he was hungry or not.

“Now, Mr. Swan,” said Joe, when the

dishes had been washed in the clear waters of the pond, and the tin bucket, which contained the supply of fish for breakfast, had been hung up by a string so that the minks that were sure to come around during the night could not steal them, "tell us a story, please."

"About what?" inquired the guide, as he filled his pipe.

"Oh, about the first panther you ever shot."

"Or about the bear you killed with a club while he was running off with one of your pigs," suggested Roy.

Mr. Swan was always ready. After he had taken a few pulls at his brier-root to make sure that it was well-started he began and told not one story, but a dozen or more. He kept his little audience interested until ten o'clock, then the lamp was turned out, the fire replenished, and the campers sought their beds of balsam-boughs. Lulled by the rippling of the waves upon the beach at their feet, and by the low music of the breeze as it toyed with the branches over their heads, their slumber was deep and dreamless. Even the usually watchful Jim seemed to think that there was no

responsibility resting upon him for this particular night, and that the mere presence of the guide was all the protection the camp needed, for he too slept soundly, and snored while he slept. Consequently he did not see the uncouth object which drew out of the darkness that covered the surface of the pond, and slowly and cautiously approached the camp. The object was Matt Coyle's scow, and in it were the squatter and both his boys. The latter were plying their paddles with noiseless motion, and Matt was kneeling in the bow, waving first one hand and then the other to show them what course to take.

It must have been long after midnight, for there was nothing left of the fire but a glowing bed of coals ; but still there was light enough to enable the robber to see the outlines of the skiff, but not sufficient to show him the trim little canoe that had been hauled out on the bank and turned bottom side up. If he had seen that, he would have lost no time in getting away from so dangerous a neighborhood ; but believing that the boys were alone, and that they had forgotten their usual caution in

spite of the warning events of the afternoon, he kept on until he was close enough to the skiff to take hold of it. I saw the whole proceeding, but of course could do nothing to arouse the slumbering campers.

"Now, turn about on your seats and give way the best you know how," I heard Matt whisper to his boys. "We must pull her off into deep water before them fellers can wake up an' get a holt on her."

"Say, pap," whispered Jake, in reply. "Ain't we goin' ashore to give them a good lar-rupin' before they make up?"

If the guide had not been there, these words would have horrified me; but as it was, I did not feel at all uneasy. I knew very well that Matt and his boys were no match for our party, and that they would all be captured as surely as they put their feet on shore; but I did not want to see them steal that skiff. Oh, why didn't Jim wake up and alarm his master!

"We'll 'tend to them after we get the skiff an' all the nice grub an' things that's into it," said the squatter, as he tightened his grasp. "Now be you all ready? Then give way."

Jake and Sam laid out all their strength upon their paddles, and the bow of the skiff grated harshly as it moved over the sand. The noise, slight as it was, awoke Jim, who was on his feet in a twinkling. He took just one glance at the marauders, and then danced about the camp in a perfect ecstasy of rage, barking and yelping with all his might.

His first note of angry remonstrance alarmed the boys, who were off their fragrant couches in less time than it takes to tell it. The moment they arose to a perpendicular, they were wide awake and ready to act. They made a simultaneous rush for the beach, and while Arthur and Joe seized the skiff and pulled her back where she belonged, in spite of all that Jake and his brother could do to prevent it, Roy caught up the painter and deftly took a turn with it around a convenient sapling.

"Now, haul away and see how much you will make by it," he exclaimed. "That's once you got fooled."

"Wal, I'll bet a hoss that I ain't fooled yet," said the squatter, in savage tones. "Pull ashore, Jakey, an' we'll get out an' lambast

them fellers till their own mammies won't know 'em when they go hum. Human natur!" he ejaculated a moment later, as the tall form of the guide came between him and the smoldering fire. "Who's that? If it ain't Swan, I'm a Dutchman."

"Come on, you miserable scoundrel," cried the guide, shaking his huge fist at the astonished and thoroughly frightened robber. "I have been looking for you, and now that I have found you, I am going to take you back to Indian Lake with me."

But Matt and his boys were not as anxious to go ashore now as they had been. Without saying a word in reply they bent to their paddles, and made all haste to get out of sight in the darkness.

"Now, Joe," said Mr. Swan, who never got excited even under the most trying circumstances, "shove off and take after them. You can go faster than they can, so if you will get ahead of them and keep them from reaching the opposite shore, I will come up on this side, and we will have them between two fires."

Joe and his companions were prompt to act

upon this suggestion. He and Roy pushed the skiff into the water, and when she was fairly afloat Arthur sprang aboard with the jack-lamp in his hand. A moment later its strong light flashed out over the pond, telling the fleeing squatter in language as plain as words that the darkness could not conceal his movements.

"There they are, not more than forty yards," said Arthur, who stood erect on the stern locker, steadying himself with the boathook. "Roy, let me have that oar, and you stand here with the lamp and open fire on them with your potatoes."

"I can't," was the answer. "I took the potatoes ashore to-night and washed some for breakfast; and the bag is in camp at this moment."

"Then we shall have to come to close quarters with them," said Arthur, "for I have no idea that they will give up when they find themselves cut off from shore."

"If we can only manage to detain them for two minutes, we shall have all the help we want," Joe remarked. "Look behind you."

Arthur glanced over his shoulder, and was

surprised to see the guide in less than a stone's throw of the skiff. How he had managed to put his canoe into the water and get her under way with so little loss of time, was a mystery.

"A fellow would have to look out for Mr. Swan in a hurry-skurry race, wouldn't he?" said Arthur. "Just see how he makes that little craft of his get through the water! If you two don't let out a section or so of your muscle, he will overtake the scow before we do."

Just then Matt Coyle's hoarse voice was heard calling warningly to them. "Don't come no nigher," it said. "If you think that we are sich fules as to go down to Injun Lake when we want to stay here, you are the biggest kind of fules yourselves. I'll break the head of the fust one of you that comes within reach."

"Matt has crawled back to the stern of his scow, and is standing there with his paddle in his hand," said Arthur, who could see every move the robber made. "I wonder if he thinks that we are 'fules' enough to give him battle before Mr. Swan comes up to help us."

That was just what Matt was looking for, and he did not know what to make of it when the skiff dashed by his scow, keeping so far beyond reach that he could not have touched any of her crew with his paddle if he had tried, and deliberately placed herself across his path. Then his eyes were opened to the details of the plan that had been laid to entrap him, and the promptness with which he went to work to extricate himself was surprising. He said a few words in a low tone to his boys, then put his own paddle into the water, and the scow shot ahead with greatly increased speed, never swerving from her original course by so much as a hair's breadth.

“Does the old villain mean to run us down, or does he intend to come alongside and capture us and the skiff?” said Roy, who was alarmed as well as amazed by the squatter's offensive tactics. “Back water, Joe, while I give way. It looks as though *we* had got to run now.”

The scow was so close to them that they had no time to get out of her way. They saw at a glance that all they could reasonably hope to accomplish was to turn their boat slightly, so

that if the scow struck her at all, it would be a glancing blow. But they had miscalculated the speed of Matt's clumsy looking craft. She seemed to glide over the top of the water instead of passing through it, as other boats do. On she came with terrific force, and although Joe and Roy worked hard to slip out of her way, she struck the skiff fairly in the side, ripping off two of her planks, smashing in as many more, and making a hole that Mars could have crawled through with all ease. At the same instant darkness settled down over the scene as if by magic. Arthur Hastings had been knocked off his perch on the stern locker, and he and the jack-lamp went into the pond together.

"Whoop-ee!" yelled Matt, triumphantly. "Will you git outen our road the next time you see us comin'? Take that fur your impudence in gittin' before your betters," he added, making a vicious blow with his paddle at the place where he had last seen Joe Wayring's head.

Joe's head was not there now, however, for he had been sharp enough to put it somewhere else; but Matt was speedily made aware that

the boy was not far away, for as the blade of his paddle whistled harmlessly through the air, he received a punch in the ribs with an oar that brought from him a yell of pain, and came very near sending him into the water. At the same moment, a howl of agony from the unlucky Jake announced that Roy was taking a hand in the rumpus.

The fight that followed was a very short one, but it was warm while it lasted, and gave Matt and his boys some idea of what a couple of brave young fellows could do when they were cornered. Joe, while defending himself against the muscular squatter, managed to get in several good blows; Roy pounded Sam to his heart's content, Jake having dropped out of the contest at the very beginning of it; and Arthur clung to the side of the skiff and called lustily for Mr. Swan.

"I'm coming," replied the guide, who was doing all he could to bring himself alongside the scow. "Keep them there just a minute longer."

Roy and Joe would have obeyed if they could; but when Matt heard Mr. Swan's voice sound-

ing so close to him, he pushed his piratical craft away from the skiff, and the darkness shut him out from view. When the guide arrived a few minutes later, he found the boys supporting themselves by holding fast to the sides of their boat, which was full of water. They had relieved her of their weight just in time to keep her from going to the bottom of the pond. She would not sink now, for she had no cargo aboard to speak of, and besides, the air that was imprisoned in the lockers assisted in keeping her afloat.

“Well, if this don’t beat the world!” exclaimed Mr. Swan, as soon as he had taken in the situation. “Somehow or other those villains always manage to come out at the top of the heap, don’t they? Did you have a fight with them? I heard sticks a clashing and somebody yelling. I hope none of you ain’t hurt.”

“Don’t be uneasy on that score,” replied Roy. “Joe and I had a scrimmage with them, but you didn’t hear either one of us yell. It was Matt and Jake. Sam was good grit. He never said a word, although I punched him

with the blade of my oar the best I knew how. Arthur was standing on one of the lockers when the scow struck us, and he and the lamp made a plunge of ten feet in the clear before they touched the water."

"Do you mean to say that they ran into you a purpose?" exclaimed the guide.

"Of course they did. We cut them off from the shore, as you directed, and that old scow of theirs came at us like a battering-ram. Matt heard Joe tell us to-night to sink the canoe, and that was what put it into his head to run into us."

Meanwhile Arthur Hastings had worked his way around to the bow of the skiff and secured the painter, one end of which he made fast to a ring in the stern of the canoe. The chase was over, of course. They could not continue the pursuit in the dark, for the squatter could easily elude them in a hundred different ways, and neither would it be prudent to follow him in the canoe. The little craft was intended to carry only one person, with a very limited allowance of camp equipage, and the added weight of one of the boys would have sunk

her so deep in the water that no speed could be got out of her. The only thing they could do was to go back to camp and finish their sleep.

“But what shall we do to-morrow?” was the question that Joe and his comrades asked themselves and one another. “Our boat is badly stove, and if we can’t patch her up, how are we going to get back to Mount Airy?”

Mr. Swan towed the disabled skiff to the shore, her crew swimming alongside or trying to assist him by pushing behind, and the fire was started up again to aid them in making an examination of the injuries she had received. They were fully as severe as the boys expected to find them, and it was a wonder to them that she was so long in filling.

“There’s plenty of guides down to the lake that can fix her up for you in good shape,” said Mr. Swan.

“Of course,” replied Roy. “But the lake is twenty-five miles from here, and there’s no way to get her down there.”

“Mebbe there is,” answered the guide. “For a shilling I’ll agree that she shall go

down there, and carry you into the bargain. But we can't do nothing with her to-night. You boys get on some dry clothes and go to bed again."

Joe and his companions were quite willing to act upon this suggestion, but they were in no hurry to go to sleep. Neither was Mr. Swan. They sat around the fire for a long time, talking over the incidents of their battle in the dark, and as I listened closely, I have been able to give you the story in the same way that it was told to Mr. Swan. The squatter's extraordinary luck and the skill he exhibited in eluding arrest seemed to astonish the mall. How I longed for the power of speech so that I could tell them that robbing camps and smoke-houses was not the only business to which Matt Coyle intended to devote himself, now that the offer of his service as guide and boatman had been declined by the managers of the Indian Lake hotels. But they found it out for themselves, and before long, too.

It was three o'clock before the campers again sought their blankets. The boys slept much later than usual, but the guide was stirring at

the first peep of day. He piled fresh fuel on the fire, put Roy's potatoes into the ashes to roast, made the coffee and pancakes, and took time while the fish were frying to give the skiff another good looking over. Then he picked up Joe's camp ax, and disappeared among the trees, returning a few minutes later with several large slabs of birch bark. By this time the fish were done, and the guide announced the fact by calling out—

“Tumble up, you sleepy heads. You've just two seconds in which to take a dip in the pond and get ready for breakfast.”

Having had as many “dips” as they wanted already, the boys contented themselves with washing their hands and faces ; after which they sat down to their homely breakfast with appetites to which the dwellers in towns and cities are, for the most part, strangers. Of course the squatter was still uppermost in their minds, and he and his exploits formed the principal topic of their conversation.

“By the way, Mr. Swan, you forgot to tell us what Matt stole at those camps,” said Arthur, suddenly.

“Did I? Well, in my camp he took a Lefever hammerless that cost the owner three hundred dollars; and from a gentleman who had Bob Martin for a guide, he stole a Winchester worth fifty dollars. Not satisfied with that, he took every thing in the shape of grub that he could lay his hands on, and me and my employer had to live on trout while we were making a journey of more than a hundred and fifty miles. Trout’s good enough once in a while; but I swan to man, if I want it for a steady diet. Bob Martin said he eat so much of that kind of food that he wanted to snap at every fly that came near him.”

“Matt and his family are always on the lookout for grub, and I should think that the sharp edge would be taken off their appetites after a while,” Arthur remarked. “Did you try to follow his trail?”

“Bless you, no. There ain’t a country in Ameriky that is so well provided with water courses as this Indian Lake country is, and what’s the use of trying to follow the trail of a boat? You might as well think of tracking a bird through the air.”

“What do you suppose Matt intends to do with those guns?” inquired Roy. “Of course he wouldn’t be so foolish as to offer them for sale around here, and they certainly will be of no use to him unless he took a big supply of cartridges at the same time he took the weapons.”

“I’ve got my own idea about that,” replied the guide. “It’s only an idea, mind you, but I have good reason for holding to it. A year ago last spring, Matt got to acting just as he’s acting now, because the hotels wouldn’t send him out with their guests, and me and the rest of the guides tracked him down, and told him that he’d got to clear himself. He allowed he wouldn’t do it, and that he’d make it hot for the fellers that tried to make him go, so we went to work and burned up everything he had, except his clothes and we’pons. Then he had to dig out; but before he went, he sent us word that if he couldn’t do guiding for the hotels none of us should, for the reason that there wouldn’t be nobody to hire us.”

“What did he mean by that?” exclaimed Joe.

"You're pretty sharp fellows," said the guide, in reply. "What's your opinion of his meaning?"

"He doesn't intend to kill off the guests as fast as they arrive, does he?" said Arthur.

"Probably not," said Joe. "But he means to steal them poor, and bother them in every way he can, so that they won't come here to spend their summer vacations."

"That's the very idea," said the guide, approvingly. "That's what he was up to, and that's what he is trying to do now; but we ain't going to let him stay. Now, then," he added, as he arose to his feet and produced his ancient brier-root, "if one of you will help me while the others tend to things about the camp, we'll be on our way to the lake in less'n half an hour by Joe's Waterbury."

"Are you going with us?" asked Arthur, who was delighted at the prospect of spending the day, and perhaps another night in the company of so famous a story teller.

"I reckon I might as well," replied the guide. "I know where to find Matt's trail now, but I can't do nothing with him and his

family all by myself, so I will go back and get some of the boys to help me."

"Well, see here, Mr. Swan," said Joe. "If you have to burn him out again, don't forget to save my canoe from the general destruction. I know it isn't a very valuable thing, having seen its best days long ago, but still I shouldn't like to think that I had lost it for good."

"I'll bear it in mind," said the guide. "Now, don't let the fire go out. We shall need it to toast the bark."

"What do you want to toast the bark for?"

"Why, to make it straighten out and stay somewhere. Don't you see how it curls up in all sorts of ways? Summer bark isn't as good as winter bark for this sort of work, but I reckon we can make it keep the water out of the skiff till we get to the lake."

Arthur and Joe made all haste to wash the breakfast dishes and collect their "duffle", so that there would be no delay in loading the skiff when the repairs were completed, and then sat down to keep the fire going, and to watch the guide, in whose proceedings they were much interested. They wanted to learn how it

was done, so that they might know what to do in case a similar misfortune befell them when there was no accommodating backwoodsman near to help them. Fortunately they never went into the woods without taking with them some strips of canvas, a supply of tallow and rosin, and a paper of copper tacks. By the aid of the tacks, the birch bark, after it had been toasted over the fire so that it would "stay somewhere", was fastened upon the gaping wound which the sharp corner of Matt's scow had made in her side, the seams were thickly coated with melted rosin and tallow, then the canvas was tacked on, and Mr. Swan declared that his task was finished.

"She'll leak a little water, of course," said he, as he filled up for another smoke, "but not much after the bark has a chance to swell a trifle. Now I reckon we are ready to be off."

It was the work of but a few minutes to pack the provisions and cooking utensils away in the lockers, and as soon as that had been done, the boys shoved the skiff into the water and followed Mr. Swan, whose canoe was moving

toward the creek which connected the pond with Indian Lake. The boat didn't leak as much as they thought it would. Five minutes' bailing every half hour kept her comparatively dry.

The boys camped that night within less than five miles of the lake, and of course had the pleasure of listening to more of the guide's stories. They made an early start the next morning, Mr. Swan being impatient to obtain assistance and resume the pursuit of the man who had despoiled the camp of his employer, and at seven o'clock the two boats were run up on the beach in front of the Sportsman's Home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

MR. SWAN and his young friends at once went ashore and set out for the hotel, the former to tell "the boys" that he had struck the trail of the man they most wanted to see, and Joe and his companions to examine the rods the landlord had in his possession, and to engage some one who was handy with tools to repair the skiff. They left me lying in my usual place on the stern locker, with Jim and the two bait-rods for company.

I had heard so much about Indian Lake and its hotels that I had pictured them out to myself, and thought I could tell pretty near how they looked ; but nevertheless I was greatly surprised by what I saw around me. I told myself that the boy who could not find there what he wanted in the way of recreation, must

be hard to suit. If he was fond of gay company and liked such places as Saratoga and Long Branch, he would probably stop at the "American" on the further side of the lake; but if he were an angler and a lover of nature, or if he desired to get away somewhere and rest, he would choose the "Sportsman's Home" every time.

The house itself looked like a hunter's camp on a grand scale, or like the cabins of the loggers I afterward saw in the wilds of Maine, only it had two stories instead of one. It was built entirely of logs, which had been painted with some substance that I don't know the name of, but it sparkled in the bright sunlight like a covering of ice. In the groves that surrounded the hotel on all sides, were log houses, tents and shanties without number. Noisy children were running in and out among the trees, the clashing of croquet balls was almost incessant, sportsmen in dogskin jackets, leather helmets and leggings, and guides in blue shirts and cowhide boots were constantly going and coming, and every one that I saw seemed to be enjoying himself. This was one of the happy

parties that Matt Coyle was determined to break-up because the landlords refused to trust their guests to his care! It was no wonder Mr. Swan and his brother guides were anxious to rid the country of the presence of such a villain. While I was thinking about it I heard myself addressed in a faint voice; and upon looking in the direction from which it came, I discovered a seedy breech-loader resting against the thwart of the neighboring canoe.

"You don't seem to remember me," said he, reproachfully.

"I can't say that I do," was my reply. "I think you have made a mistake in the fly-rod."

"No, I haven't," said he, confidently. "I knew you before you left Mr. Brown's store. Don't you remember the English fowling-piece that had the dispute with that conceited bamboo?"

So this was my old acquaintance, the "Brummagem shooting-iron," was it? It was right on the point of my tongue to remind him that the bamboo had not showed himself to be any more conceited than he was; but I didn't

say it. I judged by his appearance that he had seen pretty hard times since he left Mr. Brown's protecting care. He had sneeringly told me that I was not worth the modest price that had been set upon me, but, here I was, as bright as ever, while he looked as though he had been through half a dozen wars.

"I remember you now," said I, "but you have changed so much that I did not recognize you at first. Where have you been, and what have you done since that countryman of yours ordered you to be sent up to the Lambert House?"

"He was no countryman of mine," replied the double barrel, sadly. "He was a full-fledged Yankee who tried to pass himself off for something better than he really was. But he's got all over that; the guides laughed him out of it."

"Did they laugh you into your present condition?" I asked, remembering that the double barrel had also tried to pass himself off for something better than he really was.

"Eh? No," he replied, indignantly. "It's

the result of abuse and hardship. Last year I was stolen out of camp—”

“By whom?” I interrupted, excitedly.

“By a vagabond who calls himself Matt Coyle,” was the reply. “His old shanty leaked like a sieve, and I got wet and rusty. That’s what makes me look so bad.”

“How did your master get you back?”

“I heard the story about in this way: In less than an hour after I was stolen, a dirty, unkempt boy made his appearance in my master’s camp, and told him that he had been fishing on the pond all the afternoon, that he knew the man who took me, and for a reward of ten dollars he would follow me up and steal me back again.”

“Of course your master wasn’t deceived by any such shallow trick as that!” I exclaimed.

“Well, he was. You see, he and the two young fellows who come up here with him every summer, never hire a guide. As they seldom venture more than twenty or thirty miles away from the lake, and never leave the water courses, there’s really no need of a guide ;

but if they had had one when that boy came into camp, he would have saved my master from imposition. As it was, he promised to give him the ten dollars, and before sunset I was brought back. But it had rained buckets during my absence, I was wet inside and out, my master did not know enough to take care of me, and that's how I came to be in this fix. They're coming now, and we are off again, I suppose."

I looked toward the hotel, and there was the young man with the gold eye-glasses, peaked shoes and downy upper lip—the same knowing fellow, who had been foolish enough to take a cheap gun that wasn't warranted, with the expectation that it would do as good work as a Greener.

"We're going up to the pond, and I shall be called upon to fire heavier charges than I can stand at every thing in the shape of a partridge or squirrel that comes in my way," added the double barrel.

"You ought not to be required to shoot those birds at this time of year," said I. "It's against the law."

“Oh, I don’t hurt them any. I only shoot at them. I never killed any thing.”

“That’s just what Mr. Brown said when he sold you,” thought I. “Have you a dog to guard your camp? Well, you ought to have. Matt Coyle lives up there, and night before last he made a daring attempt to steal this skiff, and then he tried to sink her. Don’t you see the hole in her side?”

I was going on to tell the double barrel that if his master did not keep his eyes open he might expect another visit from the squatter, but just then I saw Joe Wayring and his friends coming down the bank; and as I was more interested in them and the rods they carried on their shoulders, than I was in the fortunes of the seedy-looking fowling piece, I had nothing more to say to him. I saw him once afterward, and then he was a perfect wreck of a gun. There wasn’t enough of him left to sell for old iron.

“Haw! haw!” said Roy, as he jumped into the skiff. “We’ve got them back again, and only one of them is the worse for being stolen by that squatter.”

I wondered which one that was, and found out when Arthur Hastings began taking his rod from its case. It was a beautiful rod, and looked strong enough to handle any fish that was likely to be encountered in that country ; but the second joint was broken close to the ferrule. I looked pityingly at 'him, little dreaming that I was destined to go home in the same crippled condition.

"I don't believe that any bass that ever wiggled a fin could break that rod," said Arthur, dolefully. "Matt or some of his vagabond band must have caught the hook into a log or the stem of a lily-pad. Well, it isn't as bad as it might be, but I hate to think that that squatter has made some money out of me."

While the boys were waiting for the guide who had promised to come down and look at the skiff, they talked of their interview with the landlord of the Sportsman's Home, and in that way I came to know just what happened when they went up to see the rods he had purchased of Jake Coyle. Of course they recognized them at once, and promptly handed over

the money that Mr. Hanson had paid for their property, but said nothing about paying for the rods that belonged to Tom Bigden and his cousins.

“Hadn’t you better take them all?” asked the landlord. “You say that the boys from whom these rods were stolen live in Mount Airy, and perhaps they would be grateful to you for returning them.”

“I think we’d better not have any thing to do with them,” said Arthur. “But we’ll forward them a dispatch and let them send or come after the rods. They’ve nothing else to do.”

There was telegraphic communication between Indian Lake and Mount Airy, by the way of New London, and Arthur wrote and sent off the dispatch before he left the hotel. If he and his chums had been able to look far enough into the future to see every thing that was to result from this simple act, they would have been greatly astonished. I know I was when I heard the full particulars.

In a few minutes the expected guide came down to the beach and gave the skiff a careful

examination. After he had stripped off the canvas and bark, so that he could see the full extent of her injuries, he remarked that Matt's scow must have hit her a middling heavy crack.

"I should say she did," replied Joe, with a laugh. "When three strong fellows do their level best with paddles, they can make a small boat get through the water with considerable speed. They hit us hard enough to knock Arthur overboard. Who are those men, and where are they going in such haste?" he continued, directing the guide's attention to a company of guests and boatmen who were walking rapidly toward the beach.

"Two of them are the gentlemen whose camps were robbed the other day," replied the guide, after he had taken a glance at the party. "They've got some friends to help them, and are going out to see if they can track down them varmints who have been kicking up so much fuss about here of late. There comes Swan. He's going with them, but they might as well stay at home, the whole of them. That Matt Coyle can cover up his trail like an Injun. It took every guide in the country to hunt him

down the last time we drove him away from here."

"You missed it by not putting him in jail," said Roy.

"That's just what we wanted to do," answered the guide. "But when we come to talk to some of the guests about it—there was lawyers among them, you know—we found that we didn't have any evidence that would convict him. We suspected him, but we could not prove any thing."

"You'll not be troubled in that way this time," Arthur remarked. "You'll have the guns for evidence."

"Don't fool yourself," said the guide. "Do you suppose that they will find that three hundred dollar scatter-gun and that fifty dollar rifle when they find Matt Coyle—that is, if they do find him? Not by a great sight. Them things is safe hid in the woods. Matt'll sw'ar that he didn't hook 'em, and there ain't a living man that can sw'ar that he did. The only thing they can do is to burn him out of house and home, like we did last time, and force him to go off somewhere and steal a new outfit."

“What’s the reason we can’t go with them?” said Joe, suddenly.

“I reckon you can. You know more about the woods than some of that party do, and you might be of some use to them.”

“Well, look here, Mr. Morris: Will you fix up our boat in good shape, give her a coat or two of paint and take care of the things that we shall be obliged to leave behind us?”

“I will, sartain,” answered the guide, readily.

In an instant both the lockers were opened, and Joe Wayring, snatching up a camp basket, started post-haste for the hotel to hire a skiff and purchase a small supply of provisions for the trip, leaving Roy and Arthur to select the outfit. The tent and the most of their heavy cooking-utensils were to be left behind. They were very useful articles, of course, but they were not absolutely necessary to their existence, or even to their comfort. Besides, the skiff that would be provided for them would not carry as much “duffle” as the roomy boat they were going to leave in the guide’s keeping. Their bows and arrows, blankets, the knapsacks that contained their extra clothing,

and the frying pan must go, of course ; but every thing else was left behind.

While they were awaiting Joe's return, Mr. Swan and his party came up, got into their boats and pushed away from the beach. Mr. Morris pointed out two stalwart gentlemen in shooting costume, who, he said, were the owners of the stolen guns. They seemed to be in very bad humor, and the boys did not wonder at it.

"I shouldn't like to be in Matt's place if those men get their hands on him," said Roy, in a low tone.

"Nor I," answered the guide. "They sw'ar they'll pound him before he goes to jail, and they look to me like fellers that will keep their word."

"Say, boys," exclaimed Mr. Swan, as he backed water with his oars and brought his boat to a stand-still at the stern of the skiff, "can't you stay here till we come back ? We want your evidence."

"We'll be around, you may depend upon that," returned Roy. "But we're not going to stay here, if you will let us take part in

the hunt. Joe has gone up to the hotel after a boat."

"Oh! All right," said Mr. Swan. "Them's two of the lads that had the battle in the dark that I was telling you about," he added, addressing himself to the owner of the lost "scatter-gun", who was his employer.

"Well, I must say that they are plucky fellows, and that they deserve better luck," said the gentleman, returning the military salute which the boys gave him from sheer force of habit. "I hope their skiff can be easily repaired, Mr. Morris?"

"No trouble about that, sir," answered the guide. "She'll be right and tight before sundown—all except the paint."

After telling Roy and his companion that if they did not overtake him before, they would find him encamped somewhere on the bank of the creek near the pond, Mr. Swan applied himself to his oars, and a fleet of seven boats, manned by fourteen angry and determined guides and guests, set out in pursuit of Matt Coyle and his thieving crew. Ten minutes later Joe Wayring returned, accompanied by

a guide and a small party of ladies and gentlemen. The former was to show him what boat he could take, and the latter were listening with much interest to Joe's graphic account of his adventures with the squatter. Joe was surprised to learn that Matt's way of creeping up through the bushes and robbing unguarded camps, had frightened the women and children so badly that they refused to go into the woods until the thief had been captured and safely lodged in jail. That depended upon the evidence Joe could give to put him there.

"That's all mighty fine," said Mr. Morris, after listening to what Joe had to say of his conversation with the stranger, "but they don't give a thought to the hardest part of the business. Matt ain't caught yet, and there'll have to be a heap of hard work done before he is shut up so't he can't steal no more scatter-guns ; you see if there ain't. I'd like to take a hand in the hunt myself, but I've got to go out with the same man I guided for last year, and he's liable to come along any day."

Their boat having been pointed out to them, Joe and his companions lost no time in putting

their effects aboard of it. Then they bade Mr. Morris good-by, lifted their caps to the party on shore, and rowed down the lake and up the creek in pursuit of the fleet. They overtook Mr. Swan and his party just before they landed to eat their lunch, traveled in company with them during the rest of the day, and went into camp with them at night. I had abundant opportunity to compare notes with the three recovered bait-rods, who corroborated the story that was told me by the canvas canoe, and which I have already given to the reader in my own words. The squatter was fully resolved, they said, that if he couldn't act as guide in those woods, nobody should ; and the worst of it was, he seemed to be in a fair way to accomplish his object. The sportsmen who patronized the hotels came there for fun and recreation ; and it wasn't likely that they could see much of it if their wives and children were to be prevented from accompanying them on their fishing excursions through fear of this man, Matt Coyle. The owners of the Lefever hammerless and Winchester rifle didn't see much fun in having their fine weapons stolen, and if

these depredations were not stopped, and that speedily, it would not be long before the guests would be looking for some place of resort where thieves were not quite so plenty.

“But even that isn’t the worst of it,” continued Joe’s bait-rod, who did the most of the talking. “Every thing seems to indicate that the squatter is going to have a bigger following now than he has been able to boast of in the past. He isn’t the only worthless scamp there is in the woods, by any means. You know, I suppose, that the State fish commissioners have established a hatchery at the outlet of Deer Lake, a few miles from here?”

I replied that I had not heard of it.

“Well, they have, and the superintendent wants to prohibit fishing there, so that he can get a supply of eggs large enough to stock all these waters, which will soon be stripped of trout unless there are some put in to take the place of the multitudes that are caught every year. The superintendent sets traps in the outlet to catch the fish so that he can get their eggs, and three or four fellows who live right there, and who look enough like Matt Coyle to

be his brothers, go to the outlet every night and cut the nets. The superintendent threatened to have them arrested if they didn't quit it, and they told him that they had always fished in that outlet, and if he wanted the hatchery buildings to stay there, he hadn't better try to stop them. I heard the whole conversation. I was down there when old Dead Shot was broken."

"Who's Dead Shot?" I inquired.

"I am," faintly replied Arthur Hastings's crippled rod.

"Why, that's a queer name for you to bear," said I. "I think it would be more appropriate for a shot-gun or rifle."

"Perhaps it would ; but Arthur has always called me that since I caught his first string of yellow pike for him, and it is the name I go by. I never let a fish get away when I get a good grip on him—that is, when I have some one to handle me who knows what he is about. But Jake don't know any thing about a rod, for he has always fished with a pole he cut in the bushes. On the day the superintendent talked so plainly to the vagabonds who cut his nets,

Jake was fishing in the outlet, and Matt was hiding in one of the cabins. A little fish—I should not think he weighed more than a pound, judging by the bite he gave—took the hook, which was baited with worms, and Jake tried to yank him out by main strength, as he had always been in the habit of doing; but the line caught between two rocks, and as Jake threw back his head and surged on me with all the muscle he had, I broke. That's all there was of it."

"And do you think that Matt Coyle will strike hands with those fellows at the outlet?" I asked, when Dead Shot had ended his story.

"He has done it already, and our friends here have undertaken a bigger job than they bargained for," answered the bait-rod. "Those vagabonds are all tarred with the same stick. They sympathize with Matt, and will hide him in their houses and help him in every way they can."

"Haven't we got force enough to go into the houses and take him out?"

"We've got the force, but not the authority.

There's not an officer or a search-warrant in our party."

Not being posted in law, I did not quite understand the situation, but I didn't like to ask any more questions. It was enough for me to know that Matt Coyle seemed to have the best of the game. Indeed, he always seemed to have it.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

THE boats made an early start the next morning, and reached the pond at nine o'clock. Half an hour later they had crossed it, and were moving up the creek where I performed my first exploit, and Joe Wyring so narrowly escaped capture by Matt Coyle and his boys. It annoyed me to think that the squatter and his family had enjoyed so good a supper, and that I had unwittingly provided it for them. It would not have soothed my feelings much if some one had told me that, although that was the first meal I had caught for them, it would not be the last.

“Now, then,” said Mr. Swan, after he and his party had listened to Joe’s description of the exciting incidents that happened in the creek on the evening of the previous day, “we will divide ourselves into two fleets and take

opposite sides of the stream. As we go up, let every one of us keep a bright lookout for a sign. Those robbers could not have got into their scow or landed from it without leaving a trail, and that is what we want to find."

In obedience to these instructions four of the boats kept to one side of the creek, the remaining four pulled over to the other bank, and the hunt began in earnest. Every inch of the shore on both sides was closely scrutinized, but up to three o'clock in the afternoon nothing suspicious had been discovered. Mr. Swan began to believe that they had passed the trail long ago without seeing it, and said as much to his employer, adding—

"That villain is sharper than two or three men have any business to be. He and his family, the old woman included, can go through the woods without leaving trail enough for a hound to follow. They never forget to be as careful as they know how, for they have so long lived in constant fear of arrest that—"

The guide suddenly paused, and looked earnestly at Joe and his companions, whose actions seemed to indicate that they had found

something that would bear looking into. Their boat was loitering along two or three rods behind the others, Roy and Arthur doing the rowing, while Joe was stretched out flat on the knapsacks, his chin resting on his arms which were supported by the gunwale, and his eyes fastened upon the bank. All at once he started up and said, in a low tone :

“Cease rowing. Look at that.”

“Look at what?” demanded Roy, after he and Arthur had run their eyes up and down the bank without seeing any thing that was calculated to excite astonishment. “At those bushes growing in the water? That’s nothing, for we’ve seen bushes growing in the water ever since we came into the creek.”

“I am aware of it; but if you will look closely at these particular bushes, you will see that the bark is scraped off some of them, and that they all lean away from the creek as if some heavy body had been dragged over them,” answered Joe. “Back port and give way star-board. Let’s turn in here; and if we don’t find something or other on the opposite side, I shall wonder.”

The rowers obeyed, without much confidence as to the result, it must be confessed, and when Mr. Swan and his party arrived, having all turned back to see what it was that had attracted the attention of the boys, neither they nor their boat were in sight. There was something on the bank, however, that instantly caught the sharp eye of one of the guides, who at once proceeded to take himself to task in a way that would have excited his ire if any one else had done it.

"Hit me over the head with a paddle, somebody," said he. "I'm going to throw up my position when I get back to the lake, and quit guiding. I ain't no good any more. I come along here not ten minutes ago, and didn't see what them boys saw at once. Look at them bushes, and then look at that," he added, pulling his boat closer to the bank, and placing the blade of his oar in a little depression in the edge of the water. "Matt Coyle shoved that scow of his'n over them bushes, and that's what barked them and made them bend over that way. He suspicioned that some of us would see it, so he come back and stood right

there where my oar is, and tried to straighten the bushes up with a pole or something."

"That's so," said Mr. Swan, to his employer. "Didn't I tell you that he was a sharp one? The tricks that that fellow don't know ain't worth knowing."

Just then a twig snapped on the bank and Joe Wayring came into view. "Don't talk so loud," he whispered, as he held up his finger warningly. "Matt's scow isn't twenty feet from here, and that's all the proof I want that his camp is close at land."

Instantly seven pairs of oars were dropped into the water, and as many boats were forced through the bushes and into the little bay on the other side. There lay the piratical craft which had done her best to send the skiff to the bottom of the pond, but nothing was to be seen or heard of her crew.

"Keep still, every body," cautioned Mr. Swan, in the lowest possible whisper. "They're out there in the woods, but remember that they ain't caught yet, and that they won't be if their ears tell them that we're coming."

Joe afterward said that the trail that led

from the scow into the bushes was so plain that a blind man could have followed it; so it seemed that, for once, Matt had forgotten to be careful. No doubt he thought that the bay in which his scow found a resting-place, was so effectually hidden by the bushes in front of it, that it would never be discovered by a pursuing party. We have seen that he had good reason for this belief. If Joe and his chums had decided to remain at the lake and enjoy themselves there while their skiff was being repaired, instead of joining their forces with Mr. Swan's hunting party, it is probable that the squatter's retreat never would have been discovered; and neither would the pursuers—well, I'll wait until I get to that before I tell about it.

Mr. Swan, who was the acknowledged leader of the party, at once shouldered his rifle and began following up the trail, the others falling in in single file behind him. They moved so silently that I could not hear a leaf rustle; and I told myself that the surprise and capture of the squatter and his whole shiftless tribe was a foregone conclusion. I afterward learned that Mr. Swan and the guides who were with him

thought so too. Before they had gone fifty yards, the former suddenly stopped and whispered to the man next behind him—

“We are close upon them. I smell smoke.”

“And I smell coffee,” replied the man to whom the words were addressed, and who sniffed the air as if he were trying to locate the camp by the aid of his nose instead of his eyes, “and bacon.”

Shaking his hand warningly at the men behind him, the guide moved forward again with long, noiseless strides. Presently he discovered a thin blue cloud of smoke rising above the bushes close in front of him. He looked at it a moment, and then dashed ahead at the top of his speed, his eager companions following at his heels.

A few hasty steps brought them to the little cleared spot in a thicket of evergreens in which Matt Coyle had made his camp. On one side of it was a lean-to with a roof of boughs, and on the other was the fire, with a battered coffee pot simmering and sputtering beside it. Scattered about over the ground were several slices of half-fried bacon, which had been hur-

riedly dumped from the pan. A few broken plates and dishes that stood on a log close at hand, bore silent testimony to the fact that the squatter's wife was just getting ready to lay the table, when news was brought to the camp that Mr. Swan and his party were coming. Under the lean-to were some worthless articles in the way of wearing apparel and bed-clothes, but every thing of value had disappeared. There was nothing like a hammerless shot gun or a Winchester rifle to be found.

"The nest is warm, but where are the birds?" exclaimed Mr. Swan's employer, who had jumped into the clearing with his coat off and his fists doubled up, all ready to carry out his threat of pounding Matt Coyle before he was sent to jail.

"Didn't I say that they were sharp?" replied the guide. "The birds have took wing."

"Then take to your heels and catch them," exclaimed his employer. "Can't you follow a trail? They can't have been gone more than five minutes. A hundred dollars to the man that will capture that villain for me."

“And I will add a hundred to it,” cried the owner of the stolen Winchester.

The guides did not need these extra inducements, for they had more at stake than these two strangers who spent two months out of every twelve in the woods, and the rest of the year in the city, following some lucrative business or profession. The guides' bread and butter depended upon their exertions, and they were no whit more anxious to effect Matt's capture now, than they were before the two hundred dollars reward had been offered them. At a word from Mr. Swan they separated and began circling around the lean-to to find the trail; but this did not take up two minutes of their time. They found five trails; and a short examination of them showed that they all led away in different directions.

“That trick is borrowed from the plains Indians,” said Joe, when Mr. Swan announced this fact to his employer. “Whenever the hostiles find themselves hard pressed by the troops, they break up into little bands, and start off toward different points of the compass; but before they separate, they take care

to have it understood where they shall come together again."

"That's a fact," assented the owner of the Winchester. "I have been among those copper-colored gentlemen, when I had nothing to depend on except the speed of my pony; but how does it come that you are so well posted? Have you ever hunted on the plains?"

"No, sir; but I have the promise that I shall some day enjoy that pleasure," answered Joe. "My uncle told me about it. He's been there often. Now the question in my mind is: Did Matt, before his family scattered like so many quails, appoint a place of meeting? If he did, that's where we ought to go."

"Young man, you are a sharp one," said the gentleman, admiringly. "What do you say, Swan?"

The guide appealed to could not say any thing, and neither could the others. Unfortunately they did not know that the squatter had made friends with the vagabonds living in the vicinity of the State hatchery. If they had known it, that was the place they would have started for without loss of time, but they

wouldn't have caught him if they had gone there.

"There's a good deal of hard sense in Joe's head," said Mr. Swan, after a short pause. "Of course, Matt and his family will come together again somewhere, but you see the trouble is, we don't know what point they are striking for."

"Can't you follow the trails and find out?"

"Take the plainest one of them trails, and I'll bet every thing I've got that you can't follow it a hundred yards," said Mr. Swan. "It is going to take us a good long month to hunt them down, and we'll be lucky if we do it in that time."

"But we can't wait so long," protested one of the guests. "We must return to the city to-morrow. Our business demands our attention."

The guides consulted in low tones, and so did their employers. Finally one of the latter wrote something on a card and handed it to Mr. Swan, saying :

"If we have done all we can, we might as well go back to the hotel ; but before we start,

we make you this offer : We will give a hundred dollars apiece to the man who will find our weapons, capture the thief and hold him so that we can come and testify against him. Or, we will give fifty dollars apiece for the guns without the thief, and the same amounts for the thief without the guns. Boys, you are included in that offer."

"Thank you, sir," said Arthur. "It would afford us great satisfaction if we could be the means of restoring your property to you."

"Before we leave here we'll fix things so that Matt won't find much to comfort him if he should accidentally circle around this way after we are gone," said Mr. Swan. "Pile on every thing, boys."

The "boys" understood him and went to work with a will. In less time than it takes to tell it, the lean-to was pulled down and thrown upon the fire, the bed-clothes and dishes were piled on top, the bacon was driven so deeply into the ground by the heels of heavy boots that a hungry hound could hardly have scented it—in short, every thing that Matt and his family had left behind in their hurried flight,

was utterly destroyed. His scow was not forgotten. They would knock it out of all semblance to a boat when they went back to the creek.

Having started a roaring fire, they were obliged to stay and see it burn itself out, for they dared not leave it for fear that it might set the woods aflame. So they stood around and saw it blaze, grumbling the while over the ill luck that had attended their efforts to capture the cunning squatter, and it was fully three-quarters of an hour before Mr. Swan thought it safe to return to the boats. This delay gave Matt Coyle plenty of time in which to carry out a very neat piece of villainy, some of which I saw, and all of which I heard.

While the scenes I have just described were being enacted in the clearing, there were lively times in the little bay of which I have spoken. You know we were left in company with Matt's scow, the boat in which I rode being drawn up on the bank on one side of him and Mr. Swan's on the other; and no sooner had the hunting party disappeared in the bushes, than we began reviling him the best we knew how.

The only reason we didn't break him into kindling wood at once, was because we couldn't. Our will was good enough.

"Get away from here," said *Wanderer*. (That was the name of Mr. Swan's boat. He had always lived and worked in the company of gentlemen, and he did not like to occupy close quarters with so disreputable a fellow as the scow.)

"Get away from here yourself," was the report. "I was here first, an' I'm going to stay."

"I'll bet you will," said *Bushboy*. (That was the name of the boat Joe and his chums hired at Indian Lake.) "But you may be sure of one thing: You will stay a wreck."

"That's so," said I. "Joe Wayring will never go away leaving him above the water. He'll break him up so completely that his thief of a master won't know him if he should happen along this way again."

"He will never come this way again until he is on his road to jail," said *Wanderer*. "Mr. Swan is after him, and he's going to catch him, too."

“Wal, Matt’ll go to jail knowin’ that he’s done a right smart of damage sence he’s been layin’ around loose in the woods, an’ if I am busted up, I shall have the same comfortin’ knowledge. Fly-rod has seed me afore. I captured his friend, the canvas canoe—”

“Where is he now?” I interrupted.

“Out there in the bresh, hid away so snug that nobody won’t ever find him,” was the taunting reply. “Them guns is hid out there too, but not in the same place. Matt come purty near gettin’ you as well as the canoe. I heard him say that he almost overtook Joe while he was a runnin’ through the woods with you in his hand.”

“Yes ; and Matt would have got me over the head if he had been able to run a little faster.”

“An’ Joe would have got a hickory over the back, I tell you,” said the old scow. “How do you reckon that that skiff I sent to the bottom of the pond feels by this time?”

“You didn’t send him to the bottom of the pond,” said I, angrily. “You tried hard enough, but you didn’t make it.”

The bait-rods and the boats took up the quarrel, and while I listened, I waited impatiently for the return of the hunting party. Presently I heard a slight rustling in the thicket at the head of the bay, but it was not made by the persons I wanted to see. It was Matt Coyle that stuck his ugly face out of the bushes, and his bleared and blood-shot eyes that traveled from one to another of the boats that lay before him. Then he turned and whispered to some one behind him and the whole family came and stood upon the bank. Their sudden appearance made it plain to all of us that the squatter and his backers, after "scattering like so many quails," had run just far enough in different directions to bewilder their pursuers, after which they "circled around" and came back to the bay, intending to continue their flight in the scow, which would leave no trail that could be followed. It was evident, too, that there had been an understanding among them before they separated; otherwise they would not all have been there. When Matt's gaze rested upon the trim little boats before him, he said in a low but distinct voice—

“Whoop-ee! Jest look at all them nice skiffs, will you? Ain’t we in luck though? Never mind the scow. She’s done good work fur us, but we’ll leave her behind now an’ travel like other white folks do. Old woman, you go round to all them boats an’ pick up the grub what’s into ’em; Jakey, you an’ Sam ketch up the poles an’ cookin’ things an’ every other article you can get your two hands onto. Dump them that’ll sink into the water an’ chuck them that won’t sink as fur into the bresh as you can, so’t they won’t never find ’em no more. While you are doin’ that, I’ll pick out two of the best boats fur our own.”

“Say, pap, what’s the reason we don’t carry off the things in place of throwin’ on ’em away or sinkin’ ’em?” asked Jake.

“‘Cause we can’t sell ’em, an’ we don’t want to be bothered with totin’ ’em. You will save time if you do jest as I told you. We want to get away from here as sudden as we can.”

“An’ what’ll we do with the boats that we don’t take with us?” continued Jake. “Will we bust ’em up?”

“ Now, jest listen at the fule ! ” exclaimed Matt, angrily. “ The noise we would make in bustin’ on ’em up would bring ole Swan back here a runnin’ ; an’ I don’t care to see him with all them other fellers at his back. ”

The vagabonds worked with surprising celerity, and in a very short space of time two of the finest boats in the lot had been pushed into the water, and the old woman was piling provisions into them by the armful, while Jake and Sam busied themselves in disposing of the other things as their sire had directed. I was sent whirling through the air toward the opposite side of the bay, and sad to relate, was stopped in my headlong flight by a tree, against which I struck with a sounding whack. There was a loud snap, and I fell to the ground helpless. My second joint was broken close to the ferrule.

I lay for a long time where I had fallen—so long that I began to wonder if I was to remain there until my ferrules were all rusted to pieces and I became like the mold beneath me. I heard Matt and his family leave the bay in the stolen boats. I knew when they forced their

way through the bushes into the creek, and was greatly astonished to know that they turned down stream toward the pond, the direction in which their pursuers would have to go when they returned to the hotel. But Matt, the sly old fox, had reasoned with himself on this point before he adopted these extraordinary tactics. It lacked only about half an hour of night-fall, and Mr. Swan and his party would soon be obliged to go into camp ; while Matt knowing every crook and turn in the creek, could travel as well in the dark as he could by daylight. Before the sun arose, he would be miles away and among friends. If Mr. Swan took it for granted that he had gone up instead of down stream, and went that way himself in hope of being able to overtake him, it would give the squatter just so much more time in which to make good his escape. It was a very neat trick on Matt's part.

At last, after a long interval of waiting, I heard voices and footsteps on the other side of the bay. The birds having flown there was no need of caution, and some of the returning party were talking in their ordinary tones,

while others were shouting back at their friends in the rear. My acute sense of hearing told me when they came out of the bushes, and I also caught the exclamations of rage and astonishment that fell from their lips when they saw what had been done in the bay during their brief absence. The guides were almost beside themselves with fury, but the two city sportsmen laughed uproariously.

“We’re a pretty set, I must say,” I heard one of them exclaim. “If I hadn’t seen it with my own eyes, I never should have believed that any man living could play a trick like this upon us. Two of the best boats, all the rods, provisions and dishes, as well as the frying-pans are gone. I think we had better camp right where we are, start for home at the first peep of day and never show our faces in the woods again.”

“Hallo ! What’s this here ?” cried one of the guides, who, for want of something better to do, had stepped into the skiff and shoved out into the bay. He looked down into the clear waters as he spoke, then seized the boathook, and after a little maneuvering

with it, brought one of the frying-pans to light.

“And what’s that over there on the other side?” exclaimed the familiar voice of Mr. Swan.

“Why, it’s my unlucky bait-rod, as sure as the world,” said Arthur Hastings. “But he was lucky this time, wasn’t he? If he hadn’t lodged in the friendly branches of that evergreen, I should have thought that Matt Coyle had carried him off again.”

These unexpected discoveries led to a thorough examination of the bay and of the bushes surrounding it, and the result was most satisfactory. Before dark every single article that Jake and Sam had thrown away, had been recovered. There was nothing missing now except the boats and the provisions; but the loss of these things did not put the party to any great inconvenience. There was an abundance of game in the woods, plenty of fish to be had for the catching, and Matt’s scow could easily carry the four men who had lost their skiffs.

But little more remains to be told. Mr. Swan and his party camped “right where they

were'' that night, made an early start the next morning, and reached Indian Lake on the afternoon of the following day. The chums found their skiff in the best possible condition, and looking very nobby in her new dress, by which I mean a fresh coat of paint. They gave it another day in which to dry, then laid in a supply of provisions and fearlessly turned their faces toward the wilderness; while the two city sportsmen, thoroughly disgusted with their failure, and by the trick that Matt had so neatly played upon them, set out for home declaring that they would never visit Indian Lake again until their guns had been restored to them, and the man who stole them was safely lodged in jail.

During the next few days I had nothing to do but make myself miserable while the other rods caught the fish that were served up three times a day until the boys grew tired of them. I was glad when Joe said that it was time to start for home, but sorry for the disappointment he met when he got there. Uncle Joe, who was to have taken them upon an extended tour, "either East or West, they didn't know

which," had suddenly been called away on important business, and the probabilities were that if they took their contemplated trip at all it would not be until near the end of the vacation; and then it would have to be a very short one. But Joe didn't get sulky, as some boys would have done under like circumstances. He wrote to his uncle, found out when he was coming home, and suggested an immediate return to Indian Lake. Arthur and Roy were delighted with the proposal, and I was at once given into the hands of a skilled mechanic, who in two days' time mended my broken joint so neatly that no one could tell, even with the closest scrutiny, that there had ever been anything the matter with it. Joe came after me on the afternoon of the second day, and when he carried me to his room and stood me in the corner where I was to stay until something that he called "ferrule cement" had had time to harden, whom should I see but my old friend, the canvas canoe, occupying his usual place in the recess, and looking none the worse for his forced sojourn among the Indian Lake vagabonds.

“Well, I swan to man!” I exclaimed, unconsciously making use of an expression which I had heard so often that I had become quite familiar with it. “How in the name of all that’s wonderful did you get back?”

“Glad to see you, old fellow,” replied the canoe, in his jolly, hearty fashion, “but sorry to hear that you got crippled. Where have you been?”

“Just got back from the doctor’s shop. I am all right again, or shall be in a few days. When and how did you return?”

“Came yesterday. Mr. Swan brought me. Found me hidden under a pile of brush, not more than twenty feet from the place where he and his party stood when they burned the squatter’s shanty. I saw and heard every thing that happened there.”

“Well, tell us all about it. I know you must have had some adventures during your absence.”

“Indeed I have ; and I have brought a heavy load of anxiety back with me. How I wish I could warn Joe and his chums ! The threats I

heard made against them were enough to make even a canvas canoe shudder.”

With these preliminary remarks the canoe settled himself for an all-night's task. I have not space enough in this book to repeat what he said, and besides, the narrative of my exploits, which so far are neither many nor brilliant I confess, is ended for the time being ; so I will gladly step aside and give place to my accommodating friend, who is a more experienced story-teller than myself, and who, in the second volume of this series, will describe many interesting and some exciting incidents which happened during his captivity. His story will be entitled : THE ADVENTURES OF A CANVAS CANOE.

THE END.

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